

INSIDE ITALY

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BY

C. M. FRANZERO

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PREFACE

WHEN Mussolini declared war on Britain, on June 10th, 1940, I had been living in this country exactly eighteen years.. This gives me reason to say that I had not come to Britain as one of Mussolini's apostles. When, at the end of May, 1922, I had left my country for England, Italy was still in great turmoil, and nobody ever thought that six months later Mussolini and his Fascist Party would be the masters of Italy.

I was coming to England as an "intellectual emigrant," only to seek a place where I could settle down and live; indeed, it was only in 1923 that I was able to retrace the literary and journalistic threads which were the sentimental links with my country. During my early years in England I was very poor, and had to drudge in a City office for a pittance; but I was also intensely happy. I mean, in a spiritual way. For London gave me a new visualisation of life, and a contentment that I had not known before.

I owe an immense debt of gratitude to my wife, an Englishwoman from the Midlands, who in the years of the Great War had tasted the disenchantment of an unhappy marriage

and tried to forget it working for four years with the troops at Etaples. To her sure partnership I owe all the little I have accomplished, and also the development of that sense of righteousness which gave me—on June 10th, 1940—the strength to sacrifice my career and my comfortable life to an ideal of freedom and independence. Our marriage was the outcome of a long friendship, that beautiful friendship between a man and a woman which seems to exist only in England, and that you, in your marvellous English language so rich in nuances, call a companionship. My wife completed the transformation that the immense loneliness of London had commenced ; and although in a secret corner of my heart I believe there still is a poet half-asleep, I learned to look at life with clear, cold eyes. And so it was that I did not join the Fascist Party at the outset, and not for a very long time. In fact, for three strenuous years—1926-27-28—I produced, at times single-handed and under what financial difficulties I omit to tell, an independent Italian newspaper.

Let me make this point quite clear : when Mussolini became the overlord of Italy, I was quite a young man ; but I had been brought up before the Great War, and my education had been accomplished in the atmosphere of free and liberal thinking that was so character-

istic of the Italian Universities of my time. Moreover, although in Italy we have not the caste of the "old school-tie" and the son of a Marquis and the labourer's son go to the same public school—public in a true sense, because it is a State school, open to every citizen—the atmosphere of my family, in a small town of the sturdy Piedmont, the town where the Royal Family have their private summer residence, had ingrained in me that sense of proud independence, tinged perhaps with a touch of aloofness, which comes from a tradition, so peculiar to the Piedmontese mind, of looking with diffidence at the political pushers of every shade, and with intense dislike at any undue power applied in the name of a "patriotism" claimed to be the monopoly of a party.

Those years in London taught me that men, even intelligent and wealthy men, are prone to throw their friends to the dogs and bow before those in command, for honours or even just for the sake of being patronisingly patted on the back. That independent newspaper I killed when the authorities placed my name on the proscription list and threatened with reprisals the only friend who was still supporting it, and who was a great industrialist with large interests in this country. I did not want my friend to suffer, nor did I want to be proscribed from my country :

for I felt as good an Italian as the Fascists claimed to be, and I could not cast such a shadow of grief on my father.

The years that followed 1928 were, we all remember, the heyday of Mussolini's rule. Italy was improving economically and in her political structure ; the Italian people were, on the whole, happy and proud of the new régime ; and up to 1935 the name of Mussolini stood as high as any in Europe. It was, I consider, a natural evolution for me to join the Party, after 1930. I had been offered the position of correspondent of the *Giornale d'Italia*, and my inscription on the new rolls of journalists, with the benefits of the national contract devised by Mussolini, was conditional to the membership of the Party. After all, Italians of all shades were in agreement with the principles and programme of the Fascist Government : what we were opposed to had been the method, the brutal enforcing of a régime that was admitting no criticism, thus denying the citizen the *libero arbitrio* which was the essence and the foundation of that conception of freedom in which we had been educated.

But the extremists of the Party never forgave me my independent spirit. As a fact, the hot-heads of the London Fascio nurtured such a hate for my critical mind that on November 6th, 1932, during the

annual celebration of the March on Rome, a group of London Squadristi planned an assault on me and beat me savagely in the corridor of the Phœnix Theatre, under the accusation of having passed to an anti-Fascist Paris newspaper a most amusing pun that the reader will find quoted in another part of this book. That act of Fascist brutality committed in the midst of London was kept out of the press solely because the First Secretary of the Italian Embassy, Count Renato Prunas, appealed to me "in the name of the dignity that a Piedmontese gentleman must preserve around the good name of his country."

The year 1935 rallied all the Italians to an unprecedented solidarity all over the world. But the Spanish War and the increasing collaboration with Germany saw the widening of a rift which has caused the most profound and tragic division among the Italian people. The madness of Mussolini for war was increasing year by year, and friendship with Germany was growing at the expense of enmity with Britain. After 1937, I could see Ambassador Grandi endeavouring in London to rebuild a friendship with Britain that the agents of Germany in Rome were striving to destroy: and those enemies were the very men around Mussolini—Ciano, Starace, Alfieri, Farinacci. Year by year and month by month the tragic havoc wrought by German bribery and cor-

ruption among the highest ranks of the régime became increasingly apparent. Our visits to Italy became a cause of intense disappointment. It was utterly useless to offer true and honest advice : I have in my diaries the copies of confidential letters written by me to Gayda and to the Chief of the Press Bureau entreating them to realise that all the nonsense they were publishing about Great Britain and the British Empire was sheer deception of the Italian people. All the answer I got was that I had better "tune in."

How events moved from September, 1939, till Mussolini took the plunge into the war is told in the following pages. I sincerely hope that these pages will make everyone understand why I have refused to return to Italy, and have joined the spiritual army of the exiles. And I know that in Italy I have many friends who would have joyfully stood by me sooner than take arms against Britain.

INSIDE AN EMBASSY

ON September 5th, 1939, Mussolini declared that Italy would follow a policy of non-belligerency. Mussolini's stock, which among the Italian people had nearly touched bottom, rose high again. Throughout the year the Fascist foreign policy had kept people's nerves on edge. Mr. Chamberlain's visit to Rome in January had failed to realise the people's hope; and that hopes had run very high at the time had been shown by the popular feeling of warm and spontaneous sympathy which had been expressed to the British Prime Minister. From March till April Mussolini had indulged in speeches, half cajoling, half threatening France over the famous "claims," and he had at last ended his talking by announcing cryptically that when he spoke again it would be to announce the "people's decision." In May the Alliance with Germany was signed, portending only one result. People in Italy were reaching the limit of their endurance, and at the same time they were besieged with fear.

Mussolini had not chosen, in September, to sit on the fence purely to assuage the

popular feeling. He had long passed that stage in his career. Mussolini had chosen non-belligerency for more contingent reasons. It is a fact that Hitler had gone to war against the advice of his ally ; and it is also a fact that the Treaty of Alliance stipulated that Italy was free not to enter war for another two years, to enable her " to complete her preparation." But there were other reasons, the first being that Italy was totally unprepared. Italy, in September, 1939, had hardly stocks of petrol for one month ; her artillery and ammunition were still in the state of depletion caused by the huge toll of the Spanish War ; and troops called to the colours had, in Rome itself, to be sent back to their homes after one week's stay at the barracks because there were no uniforms to clothe them with and no boots for their feet. The second—and no less important—factor was that during the gradual mobilisation staged at the end of August, there had been ugly incidents between the regular Army and the Fascist Militia. At Susa, near the French frontier, there had been firing and deaths. It seemed as though it would be dangerous to place rifles and cartridges into the hands of exasperated peasants and labourers. The Chief of Police, Senator Bocchini, frankly reported to Mussolini that the country was utterly against a war on the side of Germany.

And so Mussolini did the wise thing, and his stock rose high again.

It rose high not only among the people, but also in official circles. Nobody in Italy, in a general sense, wanted a war. The Italian Embassy in London was, at that time, typical of the profound spiritual and political wedge that divided the Italians on the problem of pro- or anti-Germany. The dramatic days between the end of August '39 and the first five days of September saw many pale faces at the offices in Three Kings Yard at the back of Grosvenor Square.

GRANDI'S APOSTASY.

Count Grandi had gone back to Rome, after his surprising pro-Nazi speech that had flabbergasted the diplomatic world of London. Why Grandi had ever consented to make such a speech can be understood only by the few who knew that Grandi had, for years, grieved under what he considered the injustice of being excluded from the political life of Rome and the inner ring of the Fascist Party: nor was it sufficient consolation to have been retained on the Fascist Grand Council. Grandi had for years laboured under the feeling that his position of Ambassador was placing him in inferiority *vis-à-vis* the Italian Foreign Minister, Count Ciano.

For Grandi his Ambassadorship was an undeserved injustice. The Abyssinian war had given him an opportunity to behave gallantly, for he was above all a soldier and a patriot ; and after it was over he had done excellent work in rebuilding Anglo-Italian friendship. Mussolini had thrown to Grandi a Count's coronet, which flattered the former provincial lawyer immensely. But Grandi longed to get back in the Cabinet, and to keep an eye on the Party's cauldron. Perhaps he even hoped that he could use his influence to foster the new Anglo-Italian amity in which he honestly believed. For Grandi was completely anti-German. More than once, during the two years' existence of the Non-Intervention Committee for Spain, he had expressed in informal talks at the Embassy, with his usual bluntness, his dislike of his German colleague. The Alliance with Germany, following close on the negative results of Chamberlain's and Halifax's visit to Rome, was a sad blow for Grandi.

When on Good Friday Mussolini had seized Albania, and there was rumour of Ciano being appointed Viceroy (a very silly rumour when one considers that if Ciano wanted a holiday he had the choice of any appointment), *The Times* correspondent sent from Rome the rumour that Grandi would be called to succeed Ciano at the Foreign

Ministry. Alas, this bit of news was a satanical manœuvre of Grandi's enemies, for it is a rule in Mussolini's Rome that a man will never get the job for which he is being tipped. Moreover, Grandi had to be disposed of, both as Ambassador in London and as a prospective Foreign Minister. For this he was ordered to make in London, in his own Embassy, a pro-Nazi speech. The prize: a place in the Cabinet, the obscure rank of Minister of Justice, embellished by the empty title of Lord to the Privy Seal. How Grandi agreed to that bargain is more than a chronicler can explain. It was indeed a sorry spectacle, the day when we were called to the Embassy, and listened to Grandi reading his speech. It was like watching a man pitilessly slashing the canvas on which he had painted his best piece of work, or a builder knocking down the wall he had taken such care to build.

That day the elegant salons of the Italian Embassy were for the first time invaded by Nazis. Grandi read his speech in Italian; Von Dircksen answered in German, grinning like a man who feels that he is now top-dog. When the show was over, the Press Attaché distributed to the Italian correspondents two typewritten pages with a report of the ceremony, to be transmitted verbatim to our newspapers. On page two there was written:

"Count Grandi delivered the following speech : *Service Message* : Please insert here text of speech as distributed by Press Department." The text of the speech was, therefore, to be distributed to the Press from Rome. Were they afraid that Grandi would doctor it ? The report, I well remember, ended with these words : ". . . in the rooms of the Embassy the Italian and German communities joined in singing the Fascist and Nazi songs." There had been no singing in the Embassy. All there had been was an atmosphere of astonishment and artificial cordiality !

A few days afterwards Count Grandi had slipped away quietly "on leave," never to return again to that Embassy where he had, in spite of Rome and Berlin, earned the sincere sympathy of so many English friends ; and that he was only too conscious of his shameful conduct was shown by the fact that, against all rules of diplomatic etiquette, he did not even return to present his Letters of Recall to His Majesty King George, but limited himself to sending, several months afterwards, a telegram to Lord Halifax excusing his absence on the ground of the new circumstances.

And so the Italian Embassy, without an Ambassador to give a lead, was at the declaration of war a true image of the uncertainty of official opinion : out of which, however,

one thing was certain, and that was the predominant feeling against a war. Long faces and worried eyes were to be seen in every room at the Embassy offices, while Junior Secretaries were preparing for the eventuality of a sudden departure. There was even a touch of humour in the personal concern of some of the married Secretaries about the fate of their personal belongings. Opinions were rarely expressed, for an obvious reason: the system of spying and of reporting which is the basis of the Fascist régime has taken root also in the Diplomatic Service, and Secretaries at the Embassy, although affectingly calling each other by their Christian names, were constantly on the alert not to reveal to one another too much of their real mind. But in private some of them were courageous enough to be outspoken. The staff at the Embassy was largely composed of young men, and most of them had not been in London long. It can be said that none of them knew England and the spirit of the English people at all—a fault that seems to apply to the diplomatic people of all countries, for diplomatic people appear to live everywhere in a fictitious world of their own, excluded from contact with real life, unable and unwilling to study the ways and the minds of the people whom they are supposed to observe and, perhaps, to influence. A few, however, at

the Italian Embassy in London had been in England for a number of years, and some had many links and family ties with English people and Society. It was very interesting—and at times amusing—to compare the views expressed in private with the perfunctory conversation they indulged in at the Embassy.

BASTIANINI WAS NOT SURE OF WAR

At the beginning of the war there was, in Italian circles, a strong hope that once the rape of Poland was accomplished, the war might end with a compromise. Then there came the sharing of the plunder with Russia ; and then Russia commenced her policy of imperial expansion in the Baltic States, which culminated with the Finnish War. The believers in a German-Russian victory began to assert themselves, but they did not dare to express too great a satisfaction, for Fascist Italy must remain above all anti-Communist. Mussolini had, a few months before, pinned medals on the Legionaries who had returned from Spain ; how could he now offer to pin another medal for a battle on the side of a Germany sharing spoils with Communist Russia ? The Italians are extremely logical and hair-splitting, and even Fascism has succeeded in putting only half a gag

over the mouth of the critically-minded citizen.

Then, in November, the new Italian Ambassador arrived. The Foreign Office received him with unprecedented courtesy. A special car was sent by Lord Halifax to meet him at Dover, to spare him the unpleasantness of a slow journey to London by train. The British Government was eager, at that time, to please Italy. For a few weeks the popular press published flattering remarks and photographs of the new Ambassador and his family.

It is a fact that Signor Bastianini was not, when he first came to London, sure what Mussolini's policy would be in the future. Soon after his arrival he invited the Italian correspondents to the Embassy, and had with them one of those long conferences that, under the régime, are often held to impart directions of policy and to take the correspondents into the Ambassador's confidence (however difficult it may be for an Ambassador to take the press into his confidence, even the Fascist press). On that occasion, Signor Bastianini spoke for nearly an hour, giving a very precise survey of the European situation, and an outline of what the future might have in store for Italy. It was, however, perfectly clear that the Ambassador had not come to London with a prearranged plan of just

biding his time until the day when Mussolini should take the plunge. The Ambassador was not even emphatic about the certainty of Germany winning a rapid war against Britain and France. The Maginot Line was still a myth, and the help of Russia for Germany was still an enigma. I remember well the Ambassador using these words: "Hitler may consider it worth while to sacrifice half a million men, and hurl them in a mass attack against the Maginot. As for Russia, my own experience during my Ambassadorship to Poland, and afterwards at the Foreign Ministry, is that Russia has not much to give to anybody. And"—he added significantly—"it would be absurd to discount the importance of the British Fleet and the vast resources of the British Empire." In conclusion, Italy would wait and see. Italy was faithful to her Axis ally, to whom she was bound by common ideals; but Italy could well wait her time for the realisation of her legitimate claims. Which, in other words, meant that if Britain and France had, one day, thought it wiser to approach Italy with a view to a friendly solution of those claims, Mussolini would not have turned a deaf ear. "Let us remember," said the Ambassador, "that the Spanish War has left large reserves of ammunition and war material to be made good, and because of this the

Treaty of Alliance with Germany, at the express request of the Duce, contained a clause allowing Italy a margin of three years to make good those losses and complete her preparation."

I remember how elated I was by the Ambassador's exposition. Here was the official confirmation of my own interpretation of Mussolini's policy, straight from the horse's mouth. How much the future had to show me that I was only succumbing to my own wishful thinking was, alas, the bitter lesson of the coming months. But it is not without importance to mention here that, at that time, the Italian correspondents in London had taken three different lines. It may surprise many people to hear that the political correspondents in the great capitals of Europe—with, perhaps, the exception of Berlin—were the only section of the Fascist press upon whom no direct control was exercised from Rome. No daily or weekly instructions were ever issued, such as are daily issued to the newspapers in Italy. The correspondents were, as a rule, left free to interpret international events according to their information or their inclination; the reason being that the Press Bureau in Rome, and the editors themselves, were often so foggy about foreign affairs that they turned to the dispatches of their trusted correspondents for

guidance, and it was not infrequent to find, for instance, the correspondent of the *Giornale d'Italia* taking quite a different view from that of, say, the correspondent of the *Corriere della Sera* or the *Tribuna*. As for obtaining guidance from the Press Attaché of the Embassy, it was a never-mentioned but generally-applied rule to pay him frequent visits of a friendly and more or less obsequious nature, but the Embassy very seldom had any instructions to issue to the Press. Sometimes a correspondent would receive over the wires or by letter a message from his chief, telling him that he had been wrong on some issue and advising him to be careful "to tune in."

At the outset of the war the Italian correspondents plunged, therefore, wholeheartedly one way or another. The majority were one hundred per cent. pro-Nazi and forecast an early disappearance of the British Empire and a new order in Europe; some glided more gently on the wind; and I went all out for a policy of non-intervention, and—short of crying out against Nazi Germany and the Alliance, which would have meant my being recalled—in my daily messages, and even more in my special articles to the weeklies and fortnightlies to which I was a contributor, I voiced abroad the folly of thinking that Great Britain was a decaying

corpse, and the wisdom of realising that the British Empire was more than ever shoulder to shoulder with the Mother Country in this new War for Freedom. Gayda called me to order two or three times, but, after several telephone conversations at the end of October, when he protested against my pro-British messages, and I retorted that he was "clipping and doctoring my articles" (whereupon I told him that this was putting me in a false light with the Censorship Department), he left me comparatively alone, and for several months the *Giornale d'Italia* was, from the London end, the most "objective" of Italian newspapers, while in the leader columns Gayda kept pouring his diatribes against the plutodemocracies. I knew that I was on the side of the Italian public, and that I was giving it exactly what it wanted; and I knew that the proprietors of the newspaper shared, in their own secret hearts, my aversion to a war on the side of Germany. Through letters from friends, through messages brought to me by people returning from Italy, I have since learned that the public in Rome and all over Italy were disgusted at the perversion of news as presented by the majority of Italian newspapers, and that the *Giornale d'Italia* was then enjoying a circulation even in Northern Italy, "because of its objective messages from London."

It must, however, be said that the Fascist Government preferred at that time to give the public what the public wanted. As an Englishman, who was then a lecturer for the British Council in Rome, told me since his return, what was puzzling the British circles was that the Government should proclaim incessantly their pro-Axis policy, and at the same time permit the publication of articles openly against a participation in the war. It was a shameful policy of deception towards the Italian people.

That the new Italian Ambassador had no definite policy at that time, was confirmed to me a few weeks later when the Ambassador expressed, in a conversation, his surprise that the German air attacks against the Firth of Forth and the North of Scotland were meeting with so little success : "As it cannot be said that the German bombers are inferior, it must be admitted that the R.A.F. is showing a preparation and a defensive capacity far superior to what was expected." I would also add that Signor Bastianini must have been, in his heart of hearts, anti-German. He had been a soldier in the Great War, and all the Italians of the generation of the other War have in their innermost soul a strong aversion, if not actual hatred, towards Germany. But Signor Bastianini was not the man to try to influence opinions in Rome.

He had grown up with the Fascist Party, from an obscure Blackshirt and ordinary M.P. to the rank of Ambassador, and was for several years the trusted assistant of Count Ciano as Under-Secretary at the Foreign Ministry ; and he knew too well that under the Fascist régime it did not pay to proffer advice that differed from the master's voice.

ERRORS OF VALUATION

A gross error of valuation was made by the political circles of London when, on October 31st last, Mussolini dismissed the Secretary of the Party, Signor Starace, and several Ministers and Generals who were notoriously pro-Nazi ; among them the Press and Propaganda Minister, Signor Alfieri and the Chief of the Army Staff, General Pariani. That mass dismissal was acclaimed in London as signifying the casting off of the extremist or Nazist elements of the Fascist Party and Cabinet, and it was acclaimed as portending great changes in the Italian policy. Two days afterwards there came from Rome an authoritative statement pouring contempt on the over-readiness of London in drawing conclusions : "The policy of Italy was in the hands of Mussolini, and Mussolini alone, and there could, therefore, be no significance whatsoever in the changes of some men."

The truth was somewhat different. It is a fact that the Embassy Press Attaché himself did report with great emphasis the reactions of the London press and of the political world to the "changing of the Guard" in Rome. So did the Italian correspondents. The day after, Embassy and journalists alike received messages telling them that they had allowed themselves to be carried away by personal feelings or wishful thinking. The London comments were either not reproduced in Italy, or were subtly doctored. What was the truth? Had Mussolini been suddenly pulled up by Berlin in face of the London and Paris comments? It is a fact that the men dismissed were all open supporters of a collaboration with Nazi Germany. Alfieri, as Press and Propaganda Minister, and Pariani, as Chief of the Army Staff, were the arch-exponents of the pro-Nazi gang, and Starace, as Secretary of the Party, had been responsible for all the outward forms of Nazification, such as the peaked cap of German model, which had replaced the fez and tassel of early Fascist days, the changes in the militia and Party uniforms, etc. But Starace was also the best-hated man in Italy, and his seven years Secretaryship of the Party had been marked by an increase in corruption, an attempt to place the whole of Italy under the heel of Southern men ("meridionalizza-

zione''), the imposition of ridiculous rules, such as the use of "you" in ordinary language instead of the third person in use for several centuries in the Italian language; the abolition of the handshake; and lately the ban on coffee as an "anti-patriotic" drink—a provision that created enormous ill-feeling among the masses, and gave rise to a popular ditty in which King Victor Emmanuel was supposed to say:

Quando d'Italia ero soltanto Re
Bevevo ogni mattina il mio caffé;
Or che d'Abissinia son l'Imperador
Non ne sento neanche piu l'odor.

("When I was only King of Italy, I'd my coffee every day; now that I am Emperor of Ethiopia, I don't even get a whiff of it.") The contempt for Starace—vain, and a colossal pumpkin—was expressed in the general saying that when Starace shook his head you could hear the seeds rattling inside. As for Alfieri, he was a pompous ass, sold head and foot to the Nazi paymaster; a man who had engineered himself into the Duce's good graces by playing the knave and lending himself to low services, such as acting the paranymph at the time of Mussolini's infatuation for the beautiful (and how troublesome!) Mme. Magda de Fontanges.

Besides, it was in any case rash to believe

that Mussolini would change policy by such a transparent means as changing his henchmen. A Dictator has no need to change his men ; all he needs is to order them to turn their coat. And, indeed, the new Secretary of the Party, "General" Muti, was far from being anti-Nazi ; so much to the contrary that he had gained his "Generaiship" as a volunteer in Spain, and he was then fresh from an intensive course of instruction by Herr Himmler in the gentle art of suppressing factitious opposition.

The Finnish War gave rise again to new hopes. Certain sections in Italy were eager to take action in defence of Finland against Communist Russia, and neither Mussolini nor the Fascist Party could turn against their anti-Communist faith. (It is worthy of note that even before the signing of the Triple Alliance with Japan, Rome had thought it expedient to declare that there was no foundation in the rumours that the anti-Comintern Pact between Rome, Berlin and Tokio was going to be revoked, however paradoxical and futile such a declaration may sound.) Besides, the Berlin-Moscow Pact of August, 1939, had been a bolt from the blue for the honest Fascists ; and to the whole of the Italian people it had seemed that Nazi Germany was ready enough to double-cross her own ideals and those of her ally. Inter-

vention by Britain and France in defence of Finland might finally have brought Italy over to their side and changed the stage of the European War. But circumstances and political hesitation decided otherwise. Let it be said that the belated announcement that Britain and France were at last ready to go to the help of Finland—made public when Finland was on the verge of capitulation—was a sad blow to the feelings of the Italian people and a good item for official anti-British propaganda.

THE COAL-SHIPS INCIDENT.

The situation remained more or less stationary until March, when the seizure of the Italian ships loaded with German coal brought it to a climax.

The legal aspects of the case were perfectly clear, and Great Britain was entirely within her right to stop and seize the Italian ships loaded at Antwerp with German coal, following the precise notice she had given the Italian Government that on February 28th she would enforce the blockade on those shipments of coal to which exception had been granted as a privilege to Italy for so long. It was also equally clear that the enforcement of the Contraband Control was not meant as a measure directed against

Italy, but aimed to prevent German exports, for which Germany was paid in kind by Italy. Simultaneously, Great Britain was offering Italy to supply her with any amount of coal, and an immediate delivery of five million tons was mentioned. Fifteen ships were stopped within three days, and brought to anchorage in the Downs. A crisis immediately flared up. Diplomatic notes of protest were lodged by Italy, whilst the Italian press spoke of intolerable sanctions and of infringement of the rights of neutrals. The German machinery endeavoured to exploit the situation by stirring up in Rome the flames of resentment.

But under the surface things moved differently. There was on both sides a desire to reach a settlement, not less strong on the Italian side than on the British. The Fascist Government mentioned that the British offer of coal could be considered only on the basis of a barter against Italian goods, and agricultural produce was mentioned. It happened that, during those days, I was instrumental in conveying, unofficially of course, between the Italian Embassy and certain British circles questions and answers as to what the Fascist Government actually meant by "agricultural produce." It was discovered that, strangely enough, agricultural products had in the past figured only as a small item in

the balance-sheet of the Italian trade with Britain, and in order of importance were far from being at the top of the list of Italian exports to Britain. It was at that time that the British Government advanced the theory that any agreement with Italy for coal should have been envisaged only on the basis of an exchange of goods to include heavy industries' products, and a figure of £20,000,000 was mentioned as a starting basis. No agreement was reached, and we will speak of this again later. But in the midst of such inconclusive negotiations there was a theatrical *coup-de-foudre*: the British Government suddenly released the ships.

It was a gesture of magnificent goodwill. Agreement to this effect was reached in Rome and in London after conversations between Sir Percy Lorraine and Count Ciano in Rome and Lord Halifax and Signor Bastianini in London. The thing was done on the eve of a visit of Von Ribbentrop to Rome, and it was quite clear that it was a master stroke by Great Britain: in fact, the news was to be kept secret until the Saturday night after 11 p.m., when Ribbentrop's train would already have passed the Brenner frontier into Italy: Ribbentrop would learn the news in the Sunday papers. The Italian correspondents were called to the Embassy on the Saturday at twelve o'clock, informed of the

event, and instructed to delay transmission to their papers until after the British communiqué was issued. It is to the credit of the Italian correspondents that no word escaped their lips during the whole of the day.

It was a clever act on the part of Great Britain, but it was also a magnificent gesture of goodwill towards Italy. But the Fascist Government did not permit it to be presented as such to the Italian public. All comments from London were curtailed or ignored, and the official announcement by the Italian press and commentators led the Italian public to consider it as an act of weakness on the part of Britain, or at the utmost a belated reparation for an unjust action. Germany then undertook to supply Italy with all the coal she needed overland, an agreement that has been kept up by Germany at incredible inconvenience and dislocation of her railway system and stocks; and the negotiations for an economic agreement between Britain and Italy dragged on, until, as we all remember, they were suddenly called off by Mussolini when an agreement had been reached and preliminarily signed by Sir Wilfrid Greene and his Italian counterpart in Rome.

Yet the Italian diplomats were at the time sincerely delighted. A couple of days after the agreement for the release of the seized

ships, the Italian Ambassador told the Italian journalists, without mincing words, of his undisguised delight at the unexpected solution of the incident. And that it was unexpected, or even beyond expectation, was clear from the way the Ambassador told of his surprise at receiving on the Friday evening a request to call on Lord Halifax, and of his even greater surprise on being told by Lord Halifax that he had already heard from the British Ambassador in Rome that Count Ciano had been informed of the British Government's decision, and that an identical communiqué had been agreed upon. It was the first piece of real business that Signor Bastianini had had the opportunity of doing since his appointment in London, and it was obvious that he considered it a success. He spoke with evident elation, even hinting at future possibilities: and certainly the Ambassador made no effort to dispel in us the impression given by the London Press that the visit of Von Ribbentrop had been a German disappointment.

These details are set down only for the purpose of showing how wavering was the Italian policy and diplomacy, and how much among the Fascist diplomats themselves there was, in their secret heart, an instinctive desire to avoid a war.

MUSSOLINI'S SMOKE-SCREEN.

But was Mussolini ever honestly bent on reaching an economic agreement with Britain? An Italian banker, whose wife was a close friend of Madame Attolico, wife of the former Italian Ambassador in Berlin, told me the following story. Soon after the episode of the release of the seized coal ships, Signor Attolico, the Italian Ambassador in Berlin, was sent for by Von Ribbentrop, and received one of those diplomatic thrashings which the Reich Foreign Minister is so fond of meting out in imitation of his Führer and Master. What game—Von Ribbentrop shouted to the Ambassador—was Fascist Italy playing? Where was the Axis solidarity, when he, Von Ribbentrop, had documentary proofs that there was in London an Economic Commission not only willing but striving by every means to achieve some sort of agreement with Britain? Offering aeroplanes, machinery, guns? Ambassador Attolico had been a sick man for a long time: sick as to his liver, and sick in his soul, for the job of Mussolini's Ambassador to the Court of Herr Hitler was not a cheerful one: that accursed Axis, the incessant exchange of visits and salaams—. He went home to his Embassy, and wrote a long report to his Foreign Minister and to the Duce himself; and sent it by special courier, so

as to be sure that it would be in his master's hands before Berlin had time to forestall him. The result was what Ambassador Attolico expected, but only in part. Mussolini did not like his own Ambassador being dressed down, let alone by Von Rib. But a few weeks later, Ambassador Attolico was granted a long-needed rest, and replaced by docile, sugar-tongued, ready-for-all-services, hand-kissing Alfieri. After all, it was not altogether wise to rub Von Ribbentrop the wrong way.

But Attolico's report made mention of a London Economic Commission. "What was that?" asked Mussolini; and this tends to show that it is not categorically true that the Duce keeps his finger on everything. The Duce was told that there was, indeed, a Commission in London for the purpose of arranging some business deals with Britain: but it was purely a private Commission, headed by Signor Gianferrari, assisted by some experts, and acting purely in a private capacity of behalf of Caproni, Ansaldo and so forth. "Private capacity?" shouted the Duce. "Private capacity? Is there, in totalitarian Italy, such a thing as a private concern, and especially a private concern producing and selling bombers and guns? Out with the details, and quick with it." Details were duly produced. There was a list of some eighteen or nineteen items:

supplies of aero-engines, armament parts, anchorage chains, and so on. The Duce began to tick them off: This was why the British Government had been so insistent that in lieu of agricultural products the barter agreement should cover heavy industries! Naturally, considering that paltry, mercenary Italian industrialists were in London, sitting on the Government doorstep, only too anxious to throw themselves on the neck of the pluto-democratic British Government! Liquidate that Commission at once! The Gianferrari Commission was liquidated in double-quick time, and Quaglino's lost one of their most generous patrons. But at the bottom of the list the Duce paused: "What is this ship-building matter?" It was explained to the Duce that it was a plan to build for Britain a number of ships: forty per cent. of the price to be paid in gold currency on signature of contract, and material to be supplied by Britain: in fact, the material would be supplied on such a liberal basis as to allow a fair margin for some constructions for Italy herself. "Go ahead with this particular item, and keep me informed," frowned the angry Duce; and so it was that after the liquidation of the Gianferrari Commission, some other official or officious negotiator arrived in London. It was a fact, known to several financial houses and banks in the City, that

up to the end of May there still were moving about in the City some such agents, drafting and redrafting agreements for important constructions to be undertaken by Italy ; as it is also a fact that in the very month of May a deal for a large sum of pounds sterling was transacted through one of the two Italian banks represented in the City, for purchases of Australian wool. It is most likely, that as Italy entered the war a couple of weeks afterwards, the wool, notwithstanding the payment in advance, has never been delivered to Mussolini.

There is, however, another version of this story, a version which throws a more lurid light on the sinister machinations of Mussolini. Soon after the beginning of the War, in 1939, Signor Gianferrari had come to London at the suggestion of an English Peer, who was well known for his Fascist leanings and had at one time attracted some publicity for his friendship with one of Mussolini's sons, Vittorio, who was interested in the film-industry. Signor Gianferrari was already known in the war-supplies' market of London, because in 1937 and 1938 he had negotiated the cession to British manufacturers of some Caproni's patents for aeroplanes and had also conducted negotiations for a supply of Isotta-Fraschini's engines for "E" Boats, engines that the Isotta Works were eventually unable

to deliver owing to their shortage of raw materials.

When Signor Gianferrari came again to London after September, 1939, he arrived, in the first instance, in a private capacity as an agent for Caproni's, and he was offering aeroplanes, in the same way that the London Manager of Fiat's was offering cars and similar products. Gianferrari found that there was, in London, scope for a very large market, and after exploring the ground he went back to Italy to report and to try to obtain agencies on behalf of all Italian manufacturers of war supplies. But back in Rome, where he had expatiated on the pressing attentions he had received in London from prospective Government buyers, Gianferrari was—according to this version—sent for by Mussolini, who eventually instructed him to return to London in an official capacity.

Mussolini's instructions to Signor Gianferrari were of a most peculiar nature. Gianferrari was to return to London as a Special Commercial Envoy, representing *all* the Italian heavy industries and manufacturers of war products, and he was to offer supplies of everything. His aim was to be two-fold: he was to make contracts for everything that was wanted by the British Government, and thus involve the British Government in relying upon supplies to be

received from Italy ; on the other hand, Signor Gianferrari was to endeavour to obtain with the orders advances of raw materials for the manufacture of such supplies. If on an order of, say, £1,000,000, 20 per cent. of the amount represented the value of a certain raw material which Italy did not possess, he was to obtain this material to the value, not of 20 per cent. but 50 per cent., by explaining that the difference in excess was going to be used by Italy for her own armaments, and this excessive margin was to be a concession *sine qua* Italy would not grant the favour of undertaking supplies to Britain.

The extra margin was intended, of course, for Germany. The British Government winced at such an exorbitant request for raw materials, and smelling foul, said that they would find it necessary to set up in Italy a Control Commission, to make sure that the extra margin would not go to Germany. It was on this British suspicion that the whole plan eventually collapsed ; for the British Government started in Rome some sort of economic parleys, which after the incident of the Coal Ships became the official Economic Mission that after reaching an agreement under the guidance of Sir Wilfrid Greene, was frustrated by Mussolini concealing the deal, for the plain and simple reason that Mussolini never intended to reach any agreement.

But, all the same, the Gianferrari Mission in London did a good deal of harm, because it caused the British Government to waste time, in the delusive hope that an economic understanding with the Fascist Government would have been the means of clearing the way for a political understanding, although it must be said that towards the end the British Government saw through the game and politely but firmly sent Gianferrari to pack his bag by telling him that nothing could be further discussed unless the British Government had good proofs of a political agreement.

This diabolical scheme of Mussolini's was revealed one night by Gianferrari himself. Signor Gianferrari was a man very fond of good living, and after the dullness of the Italian cities during those months of tension, the lure of London life must have given him a thrill. Moreover, Mussolini had endowed his envoy not only with a diplomatic passport, but also with an allowance of £700 per month for his salary and entertainment expenses. And considering that no real business profit would ever accrue to him, Signor Gianferrari decided to make the best out of the handsome allowance: and Quag's and the fashionable restaurants of Jermyn Street never had a more generous patron. And one night, over his cups, Signor Gianferrari gave vent to confidences: "I am here truly and frankly to

swindle the British and to contrive to bring them to destruction. These are, indeed, my instructions, given me by the Duce himself : promise everything, make the British sign any contract, for aeroplanes, guns, ships, anything, and never deliver one single thing. And—if you can—make them give advances in gold or in dollars, and grant raw materials. We will keep the money and the goods, build armaments for Italy and for Germany, and when we are ready we will strike them down. Do you know"—Gianferrari was shouting—"do you know what the Duce told me ? He said : Italy to-day is a great nation, and Britain must do with Italy what the farmer does with his landlord when he wants a favour, and brings a basket of offerings to propitiate him. Britain wants favours from us, wants arms and friendship ; she must give us offerings in advance ! " And then he added : " Of course, the Duce also said : If the British will offer us Heaven, we may consent not to make war, and let Germany go to the devil alone ! "

Politics are a cynical business, but this sounds pure gangsterism. Yet, I have it from a good source that the London Manager of Fiat's had received from his Head Office in Turin these instructions : " Offer the British Government anything, take any order, obtain advances in cash, and never deliver one

thing!" The same was done with France, and the French Government had in this way parted with huge sums of money.

According to this version, the protest of Von Ribbentrop to the Italian Ambassador in Berlin, Signor Attolico, occurred earlier than according to the other version ; and Von Rib. would have been prompted by the fact that the Nazi Government was under the impression that Mussolini was receiving from Britain, through the dealings of Gianferrari, a good deal of raw materials, and was *not passing to Germany a proper share of the plunder* : one gangster was mistrusting the other. If this second version is the correct one, it confirms that Mussolini was, in his mind, finally resolved to enter the war against Britain, and all his manœuvring during the eight months between September, 1939, and June, 1940, were nothing but a smoke-screen.

The final, irreparable deterioration in Anglo-Italian relations commenced, one may say, with the gesture of Great Britain in releasing the seized ships. From that day until the end came on June 10th, the whole machinery seemed to be set on war.

There was the great and last phase of suspense after the Brenner Meeting between Mussolini and Hitler. What had been discussed, agreed or decided at that meeting ?

A man who paid a visit to Rome soon afterwards, and had personal contacts with the Vatican, told me that in the Vatican circles he had heard the following interpretation : (1) Hitler had asked Mussolini to join in the war at once ; Mussolini had replied that the Italian people would not countenance a war. (2) Hitler had asked Mussolini to make a gesture by signing a Pact with Moscow ; Mussolini had replied that the Italian people would consider it tantamount to an apostasy of Fascism. (3) Hitler asked then that the Italian Press should give the loudest support to Germany against Britain and France ; and Mussolini had replied that this would be done.

It is to be admitted that the course of events seemed to countenance this Vatican information, for Mussolini neither joined in the war at that time nor made Pacts with Russia, whilst on the other hand the press campaign began to be pro-Nazi at the loudest pitch. But from other sources—Government sources—it was to be learned that Hitler had disclosed to Mussolini his plans to the full : the invasion of Denmark and Norway, to be followed by the invasion of Belgium and Holland and the crushing of France ; and Mussolini had promised to intervene at the right moment.

The truth might have been between the two theories : Mussolini was itching to join

in the war, but he knew that his war machinery was not ready and that the Italian people were against it. Furthermore, he wanted first to see how things developed. Up to then the war had been stagnant : how would the great British Fleet stand up to an invasion of Norway ? And how would the French Army —the only serious thing in France, Mussolini had often said—resist a German attack ? But in the meantime there was no harm in opening up the press campaign at full throttle against Britain and France. Something good might even come of it !

The deterioration in Anglo-Italian relations became markedly visible at the Embassy in London. The atmosphere in that building grew every week more impossible. The press reports—great lengthy documents of twelve and fifteen foolscap pages a day—were prepared deliberately to suit the taste of a pro-German mind. If those long and boring screeds were meant to illuminate the Italian Foreign Minister and his superior Duce—and everybody knew that Mussolini attached considerable importance to the press reports from the Embassies and to the despatches of political correspondents—then the Press Attaché at the Embassy in London deliberately deceived his master with his biased statements.

The newspaper correspondents were lectured

more and more on the inevitable British defeat. The Norwegian campaign had a disastrous effect on the Italian officials. The Military Attaché, Col. Ruggeri-Laderchi, took upon himself the task of official spokesman to the Italian newspapermen, and every day he was to be found in the Press Conference room expounding his theory of the inevitable British defeat. After the invasion of the Low Countries he used to describe how Germany would invade Britain: A corridor would be made across the Channel by laying lines of mines, reinforced by submarines; the air force would make a roof to this corridor, through which special ships would convey the invading troops and armaments, while another invading army would be landed by air most effectively, as the Norwegian campaign had proved. As the development of the Battle of France seemed, most unfortunately, to support the prophecies of this Italian Colonel, there came a time when his discussion at the Embassy made one feel thoroughly sick. The correspondents vied with one another in anti-British exploits. Arguments and discussions were sometimes too heated for the good reputation of the few who still kept their heads. The habit of spying on each other became an open performance. One of the newspapermen was known to be "informer" against his colleagues. At the Ministry of Information

it was no longer safe to have a chat with some of the Censors, for one would always see the fellow popping in "just accidentally." The Press Attaché showed his hand to the point of objecting to the personal contacts of journalists with high Foreign Office officials or with political and even social people suspected of "influencing opinions." To cross the threshold of the Italian Embassy was like entering a German Bureau.

At the end of April I took a brief journey to Italy. On the morning of the 24th I passed the frontier at Chiasso. As the Customs proceedings were slower than usual, after filling my Currency Declaration I said to the officials: "Would you kindly stamp this for me? I am the London man of the *Giornale d'Italia*, and am going to Rome on short leave." Journalists returning from foreign capitals did not enjoy special facilities—except travelling fares at 70 per cent. discount—but Customs and Currency officials used to look upon them with friendly eyes. The senior official looked at my passport and papers and said: "Will you please come with me a minute?" He preceded me into an inner office, and locked the door. I was greatly puzzled as to what this might portend. Suddenly the man offered me a cigarette and asked: "You come from London. Do you really think that the English will declare war on us?" There was such a note of fear and worry in the poor fellow's voice that I nearly burst out laughing. "But why do you ask me such a question? Britain and France do not want anything better than to

remain at peace with Italy. What makes you think that the British want to make war against Italy?" "The newspapers," the man replied, "the newspapers. Every day they are saying it." I put to him a question that was certainly embarrassing: "Nobody, of course, wants the war, in Italy—" "Nobody," the man answered impulsively. Then he realised the position and added: "Of course, unless the Duce orders it. But many thanks for giving me the news. You come from there, you should know. I will tell my family—"

So that was the position I found in Italy, from the very frontier. That same afternoon I was in Milan, at my publisher's office. The office of a Milanese publisher is, to a writer coming from abroad, like his Club. He will call there to have a chat with the principals, and as there are always other writers popping in, there is sure to be an exchange of news and opinions. That day there was the editor of Italy's best illustrated weekly, which of late seemed to exist only on photos supplied from Berlin, and there was also a well-known writer, particularly competent on German matters. All seemed to me to be worried to the extreme. "Why are the British not winning in Norway? Why is the Fleet not doing more?" I tried to explain; but soon I felt the hollowness of

my elaborate arguments. The situation was much more tense than we in London had ever imagined. The strange questions of the Custom official at the frontier had been a true symptom of the whole country's feelings. Here were men of letters and of culture, men accustomed to look upon events with a detached mind ; and yet they seemed in a state of panic. I asked : " But, do you think that Mussolini really wants to go to war ? " They replied : " Not only does he want to go to war, but he *will* go to war. The only delaying action may be the development of the military situation. If the campaign in Norway would show some definite sign, if the action of the British Fleet looked like being decisive, Mussolini might stay his hand longer. But with all the odds against the British and the French, he is only too open to German propaganda, because it meets his own thinking on the same plane. The German propaganda is working in a dreadful manner here in Italy. Only last week a German magazine sold like hot cakes because on the cover it was sporting an obscene picture of a woman ; but inside it was all war, nothing but war. A firm of newsagents told us : ' How could we refuse to sell it ? The German publishers gave us 1 lire 25 out of the selling price of 1 lire 50. And the authorities seemed to like the idea.' Besides,

Mussolini is delighted with all the undergraduate journals, such as *Vent'anni*, *Libro e Moschetto*, which are now printing fiery articles against Britain and clamouring for war. The Duce is giving personal audiences to the editors and staff of these undergraduate papers ; does he really believe that they are spontaneous and sincere ? Yet it is well known that in recent times Mussolini has displayed an absurd weakness for being surrounded by youths, perhaps to delude himself that he is the leader of youth——” I asked : “ Is there anyone exercising a mitigating influence ? Does Mussolini know that the people do not want the war ? ” The writer on German philosophy said : “ I hate the Germans because I know them too well. I was a prisoner of war in Germany, and after the war I spent ten years at one of their Universities. And I say only this : if Britain and France do not crush this Nazi invasion, it will be the end of Europe such as we know it and love it ; and if ever the Germans come into Italy as allies, the Italian people will never get rid of them, and they will impose upon us their political system, which is the worst tyranny that mankind will ever know.”

When we walked out into the street, I was told this rather funny story. A few weeks before, that dreadful German film “ Baptism

of Fire," which depicts the Polish campaign, had been shown in the Milan cinemas. There is a scene in which aeroplanes are raining bombs upon a village, and the houses are tumbling down, while the desperate inhabitants are reduced to pulp by the explosions ; and the German art director, with that peculiar German "light touch," lets the camera eye rove upon the subject for many more minutes than an ordinary audience can stomach. Suddenly in one cinema there were cries of protest, and the voice of a man was heard shouting : "Stop ! Stop ! That's more than enough ! Down with Germany !" The show was interrupted ; the police arrested the man, and he was taken to the nearest police station and kept overnight. On the morrow, instructions from Rome arrived ordering his immediate release ; the man was a war orphan of the Great War, a class which is considered privileged by the Fascist régime. Not only that, but the man was the assistant manager of the *Resto del Carlino* of Bologna, one of the official organs of the Fascist Party !

That same day I had a long conversation with a leader writer of the *Corriere della Sera*, the great Milan paper which, in spite of Fascism, is still the expression of conservative and moderate opinion. My friend was a man of vast culture, in constant touch with high political circles ; and he also knew England

and France intimately. Furthermore, he had never been a rabid Fascist, but had accepted the régime as an unavoidable form of government, in the same light and spirit as the large majority of the older Italian intellectuals had accepted it. We spoke at great length, in the safe confidence of his private room ; and it was with a deep pathos that I felt his spoken thoughts engraving themselves in my memory.

“ Mussolini ” my friend was saying, “ will go to war because his whole career and psychology make it inevitable. Firstly, Mussolini is, to-day, a prisoner of political circumstances ; the break with Britain and France in 1935 threw him into the arms of Germany, and the embrace of Nazi Germany has kept him prisoner. He can no longer escape subservience to a partner whom he secretly hates, because Mussolini knows that in the Europe of Nazi Germany there will be no room for two Dictators. In the second place, Mussolini is a prisoner of his own words ; you cannot go on preaching for seventeen years a gospel of war and hate without finding yourself the prisoner of your own words. But what is more important is that Mussolini is the prisoner of his own psychology. Mussolini has always believed in action. All his career has been built on action. Even admitting that Mussolini was

not, by nature, a heroic man, events have always moved ahead of him, and given him the advantages of action. Mussolini knows to-day that he has lost his personal prestige with the Italian people. He also knows that the only way to regain it would be for him to step on the famous balcony and announce to the people: 'There will be no war—we have solved all our problems amicably—go home and live in peace.' But this is just what he will not do. The rôle of a pacific Augustus does not attract Mussolini any more; and the victories of his rival in the European battles make his nights sleepless. The call of action is ringing again in his heart and ears; and Mussolini is brooding in his solitude. He also knows that the Fascist régime has been, spiritually, a failure. With his personal prestige on the wane, if Mussolini had to go the whole of the Fascist régime would disappear, and only a few of the pillars of the political structure would survive. None of Mussolini's men could carry on, nor would the Italian people have any desire to see the show carried on for ever. Mussolini knows that, after seventeen years of mental drilling, not even a political conscience has grown within the Italian people; at least, not according to the Fascist conception, because if a political conscience can be recognised in the people, it is the consciousness of their

indestructible brotherhood with other peoples, and the sense of the futility and helplessness of the splendid egotism and hyper-nationalism preached by Fascism. Mussolini knows that the world by which he is surrounded sounds hollow: there is hollowness in his own family, in his political dreams, in the delusion of being the European great man that he no longer is. All this generates in Mussolini a sense of fatigue, out of which his fatalistic instinct drives him to tempt action. Rather than die obscurely in the comfort of a popular affection that may cover the sneer for his weakness, Mussolini will tempt action, and fall in a great battle, and drag his own building over his head. After all, the only thing one can admire in Mussolini is a coherence to himself in his career: from Party leader to Dictator, and from Dictator to absolute ruler, a straight line. And Mussolini is to-day, in his heart, what he was twenty years ago. Do you remember the definition that Anatole France gave of Napoleon? 'A genius with the mentality of his Grenadiers.' The same applies to Mussolini: a genius, smaller perhaps, but with the mentality of his own Squadristi. Look at him now: who are the men around him in this moment? The young people, the desperadoes, all those irresponsible men who give him the delusion of being the Leader of Youth, a conquering

hero, with a Messianic mission—— You ask who could stay his hand ? Unfortunately, no one. Not even the King, who realises that he himself is the prisoner of the régime. And so Mussolini will go to war, against the very wish of the people, knowing that it will destroy the last link between him and the people. He has had luck on his side many times. He may still count on luck. Who knows ? Or he may go, knowing that he is jumping to his death. And after ? The old King may find the strength to act again as a rallying point, and save the country from total disruption. But what of Europe ? We have, you and I and all our friends, been born to live in evil times, and the only consolation seems to be that our mind and knowledge get rich through so many terrible experiences. Let us hope and pray that our Italy, and the rest of Europe, will be spared the desolation of a German slavery. . . . All the rest does not count ; and Mussolini and Hitler are only mortal men.”

Thus my friend spoke to me ; and I am not ashamed to confess that when his voice ceased I had tears in my eyes. So this was the position of our dear Italy, our country that seemed so much dearer seen from the far-away cities where we were working and deluding ourselves that we could convey an enlightened message of guidance ! In the

hands of a disappointed and brooding Dictator ; in the grip of a régime of tyranny where only the knaves were making feast and bonfire !

A DISHEARTENING JOURNEY

My journey through the main cities of Italy, in that lovely end of April and the early days of May, so full of joyful Spring, was the most disheartening of my life. I spoke with men of business, with journalists, with politicians ; everywhere I heard the same tale, and sensed the same worrying fear that the irreparable was bound to come. In Turin—once an elegant and busy industrial city, and now reduced to a second-rate provincial town, dead to the world except for the Fiat works, just because the people of Piedmont had refused to be an easy prey of the Fascist bosses—a business man told me: “The country is ruined even before going to war ; ruined economically and spiritually. And yet, I tell you this—if Mussolini wants to go to war, let him go, let him go, that it may prove the only way we have of ridding ourselves of him and them all ! ”

Terrible words, and terrible sentiments for a people to nurture !

I must say that, at this stage, I felt a

peculiar feeling of alarm getting hold of me. It was a pleasure to be in Italy, to meet my friends again, to have a change from the rather monotonous London routine of writing cryptographic messages that would convey to the reader something more than what would escape the blue pencil of Dr. Gayda ; and yet with the passing of hours I felt that I was growing uncomfortable. My friends seemed to be all terribly anxious to learn from me a truth which was more than I could give ; they were all talking to me in whispers, and all had the appearance of people who knew they were going to die, and yet had not the force and the courage to attempt to escape. A situation that would have been humorous, had it not been full of an impending tragedy.

I arrived in Rome by the eight o'clock express on a Saturday morning. It occurred to me that to avoid delays I might as well get my return visas at once. The British visa was quickly obtained, and by eleven o'clock I was at the French Embassy. When I sent in my name, the Press Attaché came over to me for a talk. "I will arrange for your visa to be given at once. When did you arrive in Rome ?" When he heard that I had just arrived : "Stay in Rome as little as possible, Mr. F. We have all followed your writing in these months of war. You

have been very courageous. But it would be senseless to be over-courageous. We know that Berlin has put a big black cross against your name. And the atmosphere here in Rome is getting every day more Berlinised. Stay just enough to cover appearances, and pay only those calls that you cannot dispense with. And do not talk, permit me to advise you ; do not talk ; do not express any opinion ; do not enlarge on your own views ! You would find it very dangerous." "Good heavens !" I said lightly, "you surprise me. Do you know that up in the north people talk openly and loudly against the war ?" The French diplomat made a helpless gesture with his hands : "I know it. But that is the north ; in Rome it is different." He glanced over his shoulders ; then, lowering his voice, said : "The day before yesterday, your friend Franco Caburi, of the *Giornale d'Italia*, was arrested for expressing anti-German views. Now you see what I mean." "But Caburi is an old man !" I said. "And he was an *irredento* in the other war. Surely it can't be—" "The other war ! Look at that tablet !" We looked at the tablet on the wall of the long gallery, commemorating D'Annunzio's speech from the square below for the war on the side of France and Britain. For a few seconds we stood in silence, staring out of the tall window on the classic court-

yard of the Farnese's Palace, where the marble fountain was singing. The French diplomat said: "Now I will arrange for your visa. It was a pleasure to see you. But do not call here again, nor on the British. It would not be wise."

It happened that the Vice-Consul was related by marriage to some friends of mine, and while filling and rubber-stamping endless forms we suggested that we should, that night, dine together with my friends, who were cousins of his wife. I said laughingly: "Will it be safe?" He shrugged his shoulders: "My wife is Italian. There is not yet a ban on meetings between relatives."

I will mention here a small incident. For the French visa I needed five photographs, and I went to a passport photographer on the Corso Vittorio, some five minutes' walk from the French Embassy. The photographer was doing a roaring trade for all the applications of Italians and other people who wished to run back to their homes in France, and informed me that he would have my photos delivered by hand direct to the Passport Office (the visa on my passport had been placed at once "*par ordre de l'Ambassadeur*," and the forms used would be sent by courier to the frontier at Delle, where I had declared that I would arrive not sooner than four days from that day). While standing before the

camera, I realised that in the buttonhole of my coat I was wearing the Fascist badge, where I had perfunctorily slipped it after crossing the Italian frontier, and it occurred to me that it was not very tactful to give the French a photo in which I could be seen sporting the Fascist badge. My hand went to my lapel to slip off the thing, and in that very moment my eye caught the eye of the photographer. He was watching my act with a questioning frown. My hand slipped down again, as if the act had been casual. It was wiser to leave the badge where it was.

A TALK WITH GAYDA

That day, before starting my small tour of unavoidable official calls, I lunched at the house of a political friend. He told me over again the same things that I had heard at the French Embassy : " See as few people as possible ; in some cases, pay your calls in hours when the bosses are unlikely to be at their offices, express your deep regret to the private secretaries, excusing yourself for your short stay because of the pressure of work in London ; but, above all, do not try to explain to anyone why Italy should not go to war on the side of Germany. You would find it very dangerous. And do not trust Gayda."

Following my friend's advice, I left my visiting card at the proper places, "just missing by a few minutes the Chief who would be so glad to exchange views with you." In the second part of the afternoon I had a long talk with Gayda.

The suave Dr. Gayda was more reserved than usual. Or perhaps he was waiting for me to open the subject, while I was limiting myself to giving him a message from a firm of London publishers who had a book of his in hand. Gayda tried the subject at a tangent, dealing at first with the technicalities of the paper's service from London : "I know it is monotonous for a well-known political correspondent such as you are" (I glanced at him suspiciously, sitting by his side on the broad sofa which gives Gayda the opportunity of avoiding looking his visitor straight in the face) "to do purely a reporting of news, but I must ask you to abstain in future from expressing any opinions." "Even when they are a record of opinions expressed to me ?" Said Gayda : "If such opinions are in support of the British view, it is your duty to record them and demonstrate that they are wrong." "Well, Gayda, at this rate you may as well have the London messages written in Rome !" "Your messages often oblige me to do so. And Dr. Goebbels has several times had pro-

tests conveyed through the German Embassy, supported by stenographic transcript of the London broadcasts in foreign languages quoting you verbatim, as if the *Giornale d'Italia* was speaking with two different voices, Gayda's in Rome and yours from London." I turned on the sofa: "But, Gayda, the Duce has not yet declared war—or has he?" "The Duce has personally told the newspaper editors that Italy is already potentially at war." "Do you know that everywhere in Italy I hear people raising their voices against the war?" "In Italy there is only one voice that counts, and that is the Duce's." I echoed: "Quite so."

He remained seated, and I remained seated. I knew that he was itching to hear something, but he was loth to ask. He knew that in that moment I was thinking that his "instructions" were not doing honour to his intelligence, and he knew that in that moment he was only acting the part that is but too transparent to everyone who knows Dr. Gayda well. For Dr. Gayda, the man whom the foreign Press has nicknamed "Mussolini's mouthpiece" is nothing of the sort. He is not even a man on the good books of the Fascist Party. Worse still, he is a much disappointed man. At last Gayda asked: "Have you already been in Piedmont?" (We both came from the sturdy, cool-minded, deter-

mined Piedmont.) "And are you staying a few days in Rome? And what are the English really thinking?"

The question had come! And it could have been an opening—— I felt a tremendous urge to open my mind and my heart; to say, "Gayda, why don't we try to prevent this dreadful business, and make Mussolini once more a man loved by the Italian people and respected by the whole world? I could tell you, or even better I could tell Ciano, or the Boss himself, something of the highest interest; something that cannot be entrusted to the usual diplomatic channels—— If what I have to say would appeal to Mussolini, it could be arranged at once to appear as an interview from London—— You could then be really the mouthpiece, and reply to it. . . ."

Instead I only said: "In London they would show themselves very reasonable over a comprehensive and definite and immediate agreement." He jumped on the sofa: "Tell me, tell me. What would they suggest?" I stopped dead. "Do not trust Gayda," I had been warned that very day. "He would report on you at once; if the news should please the Master, he would then say it was his own private information; but should the Master be displeased, Gayda would throw you to the dogs——" I simply said: "Oh, it is too long to explain. And, besides, it is

just talk. I will tell you before I leave for London. Now, if you will excuse me, I have a private engagement to keep." He drove me to my hotel, and as the chauffeur was driving, we spoke of trivialities. In Rome nobody trusts anybody else.

MUSSOLINI'S MISTRESS.

The following day I heard the latest details of the present love affair of Mussolini. Rome is always fascinating, even to one who knows the Eternal City well; and some friends were driving me for one of those rapid tours that always start from the high terraces of the Pincio and end on the romantic Via Appia Antica. We were crossing the Camilluccia, a quarter of fashionable villas on the flank of Monte Mario, when someone pointed out to me a villa of recent construction: "That is the abode of the Duce's favorita. It was built directly under the supervision of the Office of Works, the builders were paid by the Treasury, and the villa has a swimming pool and a private telephone line connected with the Duce's desk at Palazzo Venezia—"

The Villa was a specimen of the modern functional architecture of which Mussolini is fond; and the swimming-pool was sure to be more modest than the pool of green

marble and gilt bronze at the Forum Mussolini, which in 1937 had to be closed to the public view, because the people were finding it a bit too "imperial" for their taste. But the latest vicissitudes of Signorina Claretta were nevertheless quite amusing.

It is not certain whether Mussolini met Claretta before or after the incidents with the notorious Madame Magda de Fontanges. The story goes that one summer morning two pretty girls in bathing suits, who had ventured into the pine forest of Castel Fusano just outside the newly rebuilt town of Ostia, saw a red racing car advancing from the direction of Rome. The girls waved to the driver. The racing car slowed down, and the two girls were flabbergasted to realise that the driver of that dashing little Alfa-Romeo was nobody less than the Duce. Now it happens that Mussolini, who can terrify his knaves, is a lamb in the presence of a woman ; nay, he displays an incongruous timidity, not knowing perhaps that timidity and shyness are the greatest attractions that the despotic Dictator can have in the eyes of a woman. Mussolini is also very fond of women ; and his eyes were quick to discover that the two girls were endowed with the fresh and healthy rotundity of youth which has always appealed to the robust appetite of the peasant-born Dictator. He invited

the girls to join him for a swim, and there-upon drove them to his private beach. With the water covering his superfluous flesh the Duce, who has an easy wit and is an excellent swimmer, joked cheerfully with the girls ; and before returning to town another meeting was arranged for the following morning.

So it was that the all-mighty fell in love with one of the two sisters, Claretta Petacci by name. Claretta was, one would say, quite an ordinary girl ; daughter to a modest physician of the Vatican circles. Claretta had been, not long before, married to an aviator, one of the pilots who had flown the Atlantic with Balbo ; but the man had proved a bad husband, and Claretta was now living again with her parents and under her maiden name, deserted by the husband : a situation which had the useful advantage of saving the inconvenience and the unpleasantness of "seducing" a family girl. Soon Claretta was the Duce's mistress, to the great disgust of Mussolini's wife and daughter. It is said in Rome that once, in the winter, Mussolini took his mistress to Mount Terminillo, where he loves to go ski-ing, and has a private chalet. The following day who should arrive there but Donna Rachele and Countess Edda Ciano, coming to "make a scene" with their respective husband and father. Claretta was miserably confined to her apartment in the best

hotel, contemplating the snow from her windows. But there is nothing so powerful for a man of fifty-seven as the love of a young and healthy girl of twenty-four, and Mussolini became attached to Claretta, and eventually built her the villa at Monte Mario. Claretta lives there very quietly, and tries her best to be as Cæsar's wife or mistress should be. She has no particular attractions, except what the French call *la beauté d'une rose*, and perhaps her simplicity of mind is her best attraction for her lover; and people say that now the Duce is so attached to Claretta that if she fails to 'phone him at the appointed hour on her private line, the Duce gets nervous and fumes at his desk and neglects affairs of State.

There is a funny side to this love affair. It seems that the lackadaisical father of Claretta, when his daughter became mistress of the Duce, developed unexpected ambitions and took it into his head to become a writer on popular science. The newspaper *Messaggero* was duly chosen and ordered to publish the contributions of Dr. Petacci, and to pay him a very handsome fee for them: a fee that was soon discovered to be far too high for the merits of the contributions; in fact the medical world of Rome began to laugh at the idiotic advice the poor man was pompously expounding. Undismayed, Dr. Petacci changed

his subject and rose to academic expositions: but the medical world only discovered that Dr. Petacci was shamelessly pilfering and plagiarising scientific works and publications. It is now a joke in Rome to circulate copies of the newspaper where Dr. Petacci's articles have appeared, with marginal notations of all the sources. The Vatican has cold-shouldered the poor man; but Dr. Petacci has advanced claims to the Italian Academy, and some say that he recently put out a feeler for a seat in the Senate. After all, Caligula made a Senator of his horse!

THE ARREST OF L. BARZINI, JUNR.

The following day was marked by a series of unforgettable incidents. On coming out of the *Giornale d'Italia* on the old Corso, I ran into a colleague, a man of high intellectual standing. As our friendship goes back to the years of the Great War when I, fresh from college, was trying my hand at journalism, he slipped his hand through my arm: "I saw you yesterday get away with Gayda. Let us have, for God's sake, a quiet and honest talk." There was with him a political man, of strong Vatican leanings, a man who had been at one time posted as Italian Minister to Egypt, but who had recently dropped behind the footlights as too moderate. "Why don't

- you go to see Ciano, and why don't you speak out ? " I answered that I was not a Prince Sixte of Bourbon, charged with secret peace missions, but only a fellow on a short vacation desiring very much to return to his home in London. " You know more than you say," they said. But the ex-Minister added : " Besides, to what purpose would it be ? It is much wiser to keep one's mouth shut. Look at poor Caburi, and what befell him ! " My colleague said : " Do you want to hear the limit ? Caburi's son, who is an officer in the Army, called on Gayda after his father's arrest to beg that he would intercede for him. Gayda refused to see him ! Scared stiff to compromise himself ! "

My business took me to the editorial offices of a high-brow magazine, nominally edited by a member of the Cabinet. The assistant editor, a brilliant young man, started out with me at full throttle : " Going to war ? Of course we will go to war. The Old Man is potty, and besides he can't help it any more. Anyhow, he has found a nice argument : he tells everybody that historically Germany is the natural ally of Italy because Italy has never had anything to ask of Germany ! And who dares to tell him the contrary ? Look what has happened to Luigi Barzini, Junr., for expressing opinions ! Arrested the other day in Milan, and

sentenced without a trial to five years to the Islands!" I gasped: "What! Barzini arrested?" You could have knocked me down with the proverbial feather. Yes, it was true. Young Barzini, one of the brilliant Italian roving correspondents, son of Senator Barzini, had been arrested. It seemed that at a dinner party in a society house in Rome—he had a few days previously married an enormously wealthy widow—Barzini had spoken rather openly on the comparative importance of Hitler, Mussolini and Ciano. Somebody had sold him out to the Political Police, and he had been arrested in Milan a few hours before he was due to leave for London, where he had been my colleague representing the *Corriere* of Milan. My friend laughed sarcastically: "Don't you know that here in Rome we are living in very romantic times? You sit at a dinner table, and there opposite you is a Countess who is on the pay-roll of the OVRA—"

He dragged me cheerfully on to lunch with him, at one of the "intellectual" Trattorie, and went on laughing and jesting: "Don't be frightened. All the intellectuals in Italy are against the war. For that Mussolini is taking the *Schoolboys' Magazine* into his confidence—"

WHAT THE CHIEF OF THE PRESS BUREAU
TOLD ME.

When I said good-bye to my friend, I mounted the wonderful steps of the Trinitá dei Monti, and went into the hotel at the top of Via Sistina to pack my luggage. That feeling of panic I had felt in the air soon after my arrival in Milan was getting contagious. On my table there was an urgent note from the Press Ministry. The Chief of the Press Bureau had heard from his secretary of my call, and having returned from Florence that morning, he would be delighted to see me at any time during the afternoon. Well, there was nothing for it but to face the music. I packed my suit-case, paid the hotel bill, and went to the Press Ministry, knowing that—as the police say—anything I might say might be used in evidence against me.

On the other hand I was, myself, most anxious to get some official views, if possible. With the Chief of the Press Bureau I was on excellent terms, and we respected each other, which is more than is usual in high Fascist circles. Our conversation lasted over one hour. He was the Chief of the Press Bureau, reporting twice a day to the Press Minister and often to Ciano and Mussolini in person, but he was no extremist. Moreover, he

belonged to the coterie of the Minister of Education. He was, therefore, on the side of the outspoken intellectuals, even if his position made him very sealed-lips. "War? Certainly, as a natural outlet to the whole Fascist policy, ever since 1935. The nervousness among the public? Well, the Italian people were averse to any war, weren't they? They had been averse to the Spanish war, and yet they had endured it until the victory. Even the Abyssinian war was made popular only by Sanctions. Besides, the Duce would carry the day, when the day came: his prestige, his personal fascination (and here the Chief knew that I felt that he was not one hundred per cent. sincere). London and Paris would be glad to bridge the gap? Too late now, unfortunately too late. Would it be worth trying a last minute pacific settlement? Utterly useless: the whole destiny of the Fascist régime was now in the balance. And Mussolini had already told the newspaper editors that Italy was 'potentially at war.' When would the day come? "

Here the Chief of the Press Bureau lowered his voice and leaned across his broad glass-topped table: "The day is not yet so near—many things may still happen in the meantime. For, I can tell you, quite confidentially, our military preparations are far from complete."

How much was the Chief of the Press Bureau expressing his own heart in those words? I cannot say; but I was most elated by that statement. The military preparations were not complete, and would not be complete for some time; who could say if a prompt step on the part of London and Paris might not prove decisive?

I left that night for the North in much better spirits. In Milan both newspaper and business circles were, however, stunned by the arrest of Barzini, Junr. Was it merely an incident, or was it a symptom meaning that Mussolini wanted it to be known that to be anti-German was to be against Mussolini himself?

Three days afterwards I left for England, again troubled by grave forebodings. I had spent three days at the seaside, near Genoa, and there I had heard, among shipping and heavy industries circles, the same dark opinions on the outlook of a war. "A war will not be short, and it will develop in North and East Africa; and how could Italy withstand the economic strain of an intensive blockade?" In Paris, where lack of accommodation on the 'planes made me stop twenty-four hours, I talked at some length with the people at the Italian Embassy. I was amused to learn that they had heard

that one of the London correspondents on leave had been arrested, and they thought it was I ! Italy—they told me—would certainly go to war, but not before the autumn, when the early snows would make a natural Maginot Line on the Franco-Italian frontier ; and this forecast, with variations, tallied with what I had heard in Rome. I was, however, struck by a bit of news I was told by a journalist whose real job was that of informer of the OVRA, the Italian Political Police. He said that he had recently spoken with Laval, who had told him that nobody could expect Mussolini to enter into negotiations with a French Government which might collapse the following day, but only with a Government that offered an outlook of stability and continuity. Stability and continuity in France could be offered only by Laval, and he—Laval—would soon be in a position to come into the limelight and negotiate with Mussolini. Who would then have given much weight to such a statement ?

A POISONOUS ATMOSPHERE

I arrived in London on the last 'plane on May 9th ; the following day Holland and Belgium were invaded, and the Battle of France began.

We well remember those tragic days, during which every hour seemed to destroy another thread of our last hope. For the Italians, those were days of terrible anguish and desperate sorrow. The Italian Press was howling against Britain and France. The messages from Rome told of the horrible demonstrations. To every level-minded Italian it was evident that the demonstrations aimed at one main thing only, and that was to impress the Italian masses, to frighten them into the conviction that it was useless to oppose the war. That those demonstrations were childish affairs was of secondary importance, because in Italy "patriotic demonstrations" have always been entrusted to the outbursts of university students. It was the same in 1915. But now, behind those demonstrations there was the Black Hand of the Fascist Party. The Party was the instigating hand, and above the Party stood Mussolini himself, gloating and perhaps deluding himself that the students who were noisily parading the streets of Rome were the embodiment of that warlike spirit of which he had spoken to them when he had received with particular benevolence the chiefs of university organisations and the editors of their ill-written publications. In those days the things written by the Italian press reached an apex of mendacity and a paroxysm of

incredibility. The review, *Relazioni Internazionali*, wrote that, "at last the Italian people would have the joy of going to war against their natural enemies, Britain and France." What a lie! If the Italian people had an enemy, it was not Britain nor France, but Nazi Germany!

And yet, Mussolini was putting off the declaration of war—from day to day, from week to week. Why? Holland fell; Belgium capitulated, with the mysterious surrender of King Leopold; France gave in; the British retreated from Dunkirk; and yet, Mussolini was content to shout and hold his hand. Let us remember this: that Mussolini declared war only after Reynaud had asked the British Government to release France from her pledge not to sue for a separate peace. Mussolini declared war when France was actually beaten and on the verge of surrender. It was a most dastardly and cowardly act on the part of Mussolini. It was a misdeed that will rank black in the history of Italy, and which destroyed at a stroke all the "blague" that Fascism was a creed of heroism. Why did Mussolini lower himself to such an incredibly abysmal level? Is it not legitimate to surmise that Mussolini would have preferred to hold his hand still longer, and only entered the war hastily when he was afraid that the collapse of France

would give Hitler a supreme victory to the total exclusion of Fascist Italy?

At the Embassy in London the atmosphere became too poisonous to breathe. It was simply sickening to listen to the Military Attaché gloating over a map of Western Europe and visualising his famous "corridor of invasion" across the Channel! The Ambassador was nowhere to be seen. Only Secretaries and Attachés had the job of repeating like automatons: "Italy is already theoretically in the war—it is only a question of days, perhaps of hours. We are waiting for the Duce to speak the word." On Friday, June 7th, it was suggested that some of the newspaper correspondents should pack up and return to Italy. Incidentally, the idea was quickly dropped, for that same day it got about in the Press Room at the Ministry of Information, and it had to be hastily denied.

And yet, the Italian banking circles in the City were still convinced that Mussolini would not do it! "Why"—one banker told me on the very Sunday, the ninth—"on Thursday we again bought wool for the Government. If Mussolini goes to war, he will lose the gold and the wool. And, besides, how can Italy risk losing the harvest, that is due to commence at the end of June?"

JUNE THE 10TH

So the Monday came. The memorable June 10th, which will remain in men's memories as the day on which Italy, for the first time in her history, took arms against Britain. The news from Rome was no worse. Since Mussolini had declared null and void the economic agreement that Sir Wilfrid Greene had so painfully reached in Rome, it was clear that only the worst could be expected. Shortly after four o'clock I walked with a colleague into the Press Room at the Ministry of Information. The desk clerk told us that the Italian correspondents were urgently wanted at the Embassy at four-thirty. When we got there, we were ushered hastily into the morning-room. We found the room half-full. There was the Ambassador speaking, surrounded by the whole staff, and facing him were the heads of the London Fascio, the personnel of the Italian schools and the journalists. I had missed the beginning of the speech, and I stood there, staring stolidly at the two lovely great Magnasco landscapes on each side of the fireplace. But soon the Ambassador said: "I say to you all, be of glad heart, and we will meet here to-morrow for the journey that from to-day will take us towards victory, in the name of Fascist Italy and of the Duce."

Oh, God, it was war ! The Ambassador said loudly : “ *Saluto al Duce !* ” The small crowd raised their hands in the Fascist salute. And then—they dispersed, without a word, each staring right ahead, like a little crowd that returns from a funeral:

It was then exactly five o’clock in the afternoon. Mussolini was to speak to the masses from the famous balcony, at six o’clock ; from the famous balcony under which the poor Italian people had for seventeen years played the part of the chorus.

It is rather strange that the Embassy staff and the journalists should have been given a “ private view ” of Mussolini’s declaration of war. Perhaps it was to make it coincide with the official declaration of war, which took place in Rome at four-fifteen and four-forty-five for the British and French Ambassadors, respectively.

We dispersed quickly and silently. Like an automaton I drove to the Ministry of Information, to dismiss my assistant who at that time would be waiting for me, and to collect my few personal belongings. I took a last look around the room, where we had so often discussed, with colleagues from all nations, the scanty possibility of sparing Italy the terrible ordeal. Then I rang up a

friend in Whitehall. "Good God!" he ejaculated from the other end, "you don't tell me! And we don't know it yet." Crossing the main hall, I turned into Room 43—the Press Censorship Room. Lieut.-Commander Rich, the Chief Censor, was there at his desk at the end of the long room, where the telephone boxes had been silent for a few weeks, after the Continental lines on the French coast had been damaged or had fallen into enemy hands. I walked to the end of the room. I must have looked very upset, for Commander Rich and the Assistant Censor chaffed me about it. I said: "I have come to say good-bye." They sensed that the terrible thing had happened. "And so it is done?" "Yes, at four-forty-five. It will be on the wireless at 6 p.m." We felt overwhelmed by our feelings. Silently we shook hands. Then I walked out, feeling like a drunken man.

That night, at six o'clock, Mussolini announced to the Italian people that he was giving them the joy of their life—to go to war against Britain. The wireless brought to England the echo of the Rome ceremony, where, on the Piazza Venezia, there stood the customary well-drilled crowd of shouting Blackshirts. But at Genoa, at Milan, at Turin, the people listened sullenly to the

speech relayed through the loud-speakers ; and then the crowds dispersed, without clapping, without a cheer, like the little crowd that was at the London Embassy.

THE LOYAL AND THE DISLOYAL POPULATION

THE preceding record of events as they developed from September, 1939, till June 10th 1940, I have set down, taking them from my diary, to show, in the light of personal experience, how much and how profoundly the Italian people were deceived by Mussolini and by Fascism imposing upon Italy a war that every decent Italian loathed with all his heart and soul.

Can the Italian people be counted among the Allies in the cause of Freedom? I say this: Potentially the Italian people is ready for a revolt against Fascism. It is this spirit of potential revolt, of which the Italians themselves are, as a mass, still unconscious, which makes Italy the Achilles heel of the Axis Alliance. The elements of this revolt can be put down as follows (and the order in which they are given is not, necessarily, the order of their importance) :

(a) The weariness caused in every class by the rule of the Fascist régime

(b) the consciousness that the sacrifices endured for seventeen years have been useless

- (c) the indifference of the people to the much-boosted spirit of Italian Imperialism
- (d) the consciousness that the foreign policy of the régime has been erratic, hollow, and with no better results than the policy of pre-Fascist Governments
- (e) the instinctive aversion of the Italians to Germany
- (f) the utter lack of faith in solidarity between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany
- (g) the profound and vast desire of the individual to be allowed to live his own life.
- (h) the conviction, increased by the events, that in Europe there is no place for both Mussolini and Hitler, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, and that Italy is gradually sinking to a level of political vassalage such as, since her unification, she has never known before.

Only the Italian people know the sacrifices that they have endured since they placed Mussolini upon an altar of idolatry and allowed Fascism to evolve as a ruthless régime of Party tyranny; and only the Italians can say how weary they have grown under the rule of the régime and its bitter disappointments.

The New Order inaugurated by Fascism had begun with a highly conservative

character. What made Fascism "respectable" in its inception was, indeed, its boast of reaction. Fascism had delivered Italy from Communism, and Fascism was the St. George of Europe against the Dragon of Bolshevism. But Fascism had not fought against Communism, for the simple reason that there never was a Communist rising in Italy. Even less was there a Fascist Revolution. The Fascist Revolution has been a "literary invention" of the Fascist historians. A revolution made it possible to invent "martyrs," the "martyrs of the Fascist Revolution," as they are officially designated; and to-day their sons can claim privileges that are surpassed only by the blatant nepotism of the big bosses. A "Fascist Revolution" made it possible to create a complex myth of Fascist episodes attributed to the "Sansepolcristi," and those who "used to assemble in the lair of Via San Paolo da Cannobio." The name of this obscure street of Milan was, a few years ago, the cause of a fantastic slip of the tongue on the part of the Chief of the London' Fasclio, who, in extolling, on the anniversary of the "March on Rome," the virtues of those early Fascists, called them "the men who came from the house in Via San Pietro all'Orto"; the address of a notorious brothel in Milan! The slip could not have been more appropriate if it had been

intentional,' for a dirtier lot of scoundrels and cads could not have been assembled to compose the ill-famed Squadristi.¹ Yet, one of them was in the early years of Fascist rule appointed Secretary of the Milan section of the Party, a position carrying uncontrolled sway over the industrialists and business men of the wealthy province of Milan. And the Milanese people had to stomach the disgusting spectacle of this lousy rascal—who had been a telegraph messenger—sitting in his official box at the Scala Theatre in the company of his mistress, bedecked with jewels—a woman who had been a public prostitute! The scandals for grab in the administration of the city of Milan at that time have never been obliterated.

In the same way was invented Mussolini leading the march on Rome. Mussolini never led the march on Rome, which was no more heroic or terrible than any other march of demonstrators. When the march on Rome took place, Mussolini was in Milan, sitting in the small editorial office of his newspaper, comforted by a few friends and by his afterwards discarded mistress, Signora Margherita Sarfatti, who had quite a job

¹ The author was, on November 6th, 1932, assaulted by a group of London Squadristi and savagely beaten in the Phœnix Theatre in Charing Cross Road, because they suspected him of having passed the amusing slip to the anti-Fascist Paris newspaper, *Giustizia e Libertà*.

to prevent him from running away to Switzerland.

It was in later years that Fascism became a régime, and from a dictatorship evolved into a tyranny. When Fascism was born, and during the early years of Fascist rule, the Italian people were so downhearted that they only wanted to believe. In what? In anything—in any promise that things were going to be different and, perhaps, better than they had been since 1918 (and certainly things had been bad enough in Italy after 1918). Mussolini promised everything to everybody. The difference between Mussolini and Hitler was that Hitler was a fanatic, and Mussolini, on the contrary, was an ambitious realist who wanted power. Hitler was characteristically German, and Mussolini was characteristically Latin—cynical, subtle, secretly despising the masses who were putting him on a pedestal, visualising that history could repeat itself if only a man knew how to play the rôle of a popular dictator. Even Mussolini's rhetoric was the calculated result of a careful study of effects upon the masses. His very first speech to the Italian Parliament was reminiscent of Cromwell; and his dialogues with the crowd had been invented by D'Annunzio, the poet. Nothing was original, not even the Latin nomenclature of the Militia, which had been exhumed by D'Annunzio

at the time of the Fiume affair; nor the naming of the years of power—"Year of the Fascist Era," a style which had already been used in the French Revolution. Later, the tendency to mimicry induced Mussolini to copy Napoleon's greatcoats, and the Dictator's vanity showed the fray.

FASCISM IS NOW A FEUDALISM.

After seventeen years Fascism has grown into a feudalism, unbearable to the Italian people. In Italy to-day there are the barons and the serfs. There is not even a third class. In Fascist Italy either you are a baron or you are a serf. Rome knew something of this in the years of the degenerating Republic, which were the years of the Dictatorship: every dictator was supported by his own barons, and within the orbit of each baron there moved and thrived a number of *clientes*. But dictatorship rests, in ultimate analysis, upon popular favour: the day that dictatorship overrules the wish of the people it becomes a tyranny.

It is said that Germany was able to break France because there were serious rifts in the social structure of the French nation. The argument applies with equal strength to Italy. The rifts in the social structure of

the Fascist régime are very wide and very deep. More: these cleavages are apparent to every enlightened Italian, notwithstanding the efforts of the Party to camouflage them.

I have already quoted the words of a Turin business man: "If Mussolini wants to go to war, let him go, since it may be the only way to get rid of him and them all." These are very grave words from a people who are supposed to be united behind the Duce, words that reveal a serious pathological condition in the organism of the country, for what could be more tragic than to welcome the indescribable evils of war as the only way to be rid of a régime which has become unbearable?

One could write volumes to explain the reasons why Fascism is to-day an intolerable slavery for the Italian people. It may suffice to say that, broadly speaking, the people of Italy could be divided into the loyal population and the disloyal. Where does the division commence, and where does it end? The division commences at the top, in the very high strata of the Fascist structure, and it goes down, deep and deep into the masses, traversing every class and every section of the Italian people. Secondly, what is the proportion between the loyal and the disloyal population? The answer must be very cautious, because for a long number of years

the huge majority of the Italian people have wholeheartedly supported Mussolini and the Fascist régime. Only of recent years the people have begun to distinguish painfully between Mussolini and the régime, and to justify, out of popular love, Mussolini as not responsible for the errors made and the hardship caused by the régime. In fact, only the impending danger of war and the deliberate pursuance of a policy which was bound to bring Italy into the conflict made the people see that it was hopeless to distinguish between the Duce and the régime. The disloyal population can, therefore, be considered as a fluid entity, or rather like the first heap of snow that by rolling may grow into a terrifying avalanche.

Besides, revolts are never the work of masses but always of minorities. And in computing the disloyal population of Italy—fluid and potentially ever-increasing—one must take into account a large number of factors, spiritual, economic, political, traditional; and consider among the disloyal the emigrés, the Italians abroad, the Church, and lastly the Jews who, after the Racial Laws, have *en masse* deserted Fascism.

Each class of the Italian people contains the nucleus of a disloyal cell. The complex and incredibly cumbersome structure of the Corporative State has never satisfied either

the workers, the industrialists or the employers ; and a certain Syndicalist activity has never ceased to exist in Italy. To the industrialists not less than to the agrarians the Corporative Fascist State has been distasteful. Mussolini has enforced upon every branch of production and indeed upon all private and vested interests a perpetual wartime economy, in which the interests of the individual have been ruthlessly subordinated to the necessities of a future war. War ! War ! War ! The incessant war cry that Fascism has relentlessly instilled into the new generation, without stopping to think that the very sound of it was repellent to the soul of the women and to the mind of the average citizen and exasperating to the industrialists and agrarians, who were longing for a span of ordinary peaceful life.

In this respect Mussolini marched every year more rapidly—and fatally—towards a régime where private capitalism ceased to have an independent value and to be a force in the nation, towards a régime of “nationalisation,” that could end only in a régime with every activity of life tyrannically State controlled.

THE GREAT DELUSION

In every class of the Italian people, and in the Fascist Party itself, there are numberless

disillusioned and disappointed men. All the men who have seen their faith and their ideals frustrated by the régime. All the men who have seen their civil liberties trampled upon and crushed by the growing tyranny. All the men who have seen their careers spoilt to make room for the blatant nepotism of the Party. This widespread sense of delusion, this general realisation of disappointment is the ferment that leavens the discontent which makes the average Italian brood over his fate, and regret the unlimited faith which he had placed in the Fascist régime. The Italians are, instinctively, romantic. They are now in the position of a man who finds himself deceived by the woman in whom, in his passion, he had trusted blindly. The Italian people did believe in Mussolini to the limit of absurdity, they believed in Mussolini to the point of allowing to be stencilled on every wall the words "Mussolini is always right"; and for seventeen years the Italian people has resignedly accepted all sorts of laws, of reforms, of impositions, which if salutary at times have too often been nonsensical and tyrannical. The Italian people have now come to realise that the very substratum of the doctrines that Fascism preached for seventeen years was contrary to the spirit of the people—worse, it was a colossal imposture. On the walls of factories and farm-

houses, on the rocks of the Alps, along the sea coast, throughout the Peninsula, from the Alps to the end of Sicily, the Italian people have been for seventeen years obliged to read, painted and stencilled, the high-sounding maxims that Mussolini was supposed to deliver as a new gospel, and which were issued by a special Bureau appointed to coin the Golden Treasure of the Duce ! One of the most frequently recurring maxims says : " The essence of the Bourgeoisie was egotism and selfishness ; the essence of Fascism is heroism." Who could to-day in Italy mention without shame the " heroic spirit " that Fascism has displayed in stabbing France in the back when France was already on her knees ?

It is a common saying in Italy that the " heroic spirit " of Fascism was revealed foremost in the unbounded energy with which high Bosses and protégées threw themselves at the trough into which the régime has shamelessly transformed the nation. The history of Fascism is, in the eyes of John Citizen, an uninterrupted series of mean scandals too often hushed up to cover mal-administration or rackets and grab. A man can progress, in any business or career, only if he can strap-hang in the shadow of some influential Boss. To obtain a Chair of Philosophy at the University it is no longer

necessary to be a philosopher ; all one needs is to have been a *Sansepolcrista*, or a Martyr-of-the-Fascist-Cause. Indeed, it has become a regular racket, the concession of diplomas of *Squadrista* or of *Blackshirts-of-the-First-Hour*. And those who know how to bark loudest secure the finer places at the national manger. Look at the notorious Farinacci. He was one of those who shouted most loudly for the Racial Laws and the persecution of the Jews. Now Signor Farinacci, Member of the Fascist Grand Council and Minister of State, draws handsome fees by assisting some of the wealthiest Italian Jews to secure the benefit of discrimination from the Racial Laws. Once, among Fascists, another of Mussolini's maxims repeated with pride was : *Nudi alla meta*, that is to say, "We will reach our goal without personal gain." Now this golden maxim is sarcastically used by the people when mentioning the late Count Costanzo Ciano, father of the Foreign Minister, about whom history will say : "Born a poor man, he was of such thrifty disposition that by his small savings he managed to leave one thousand million lire!"

The whole of the Fascist Party is reduced to a clique whose sole interest is to preserve the *status quo* and their own positions, in the name of Mussolini's motto : "Believe, Obey

and Fight." Believe in what? In the insincerity of a political system that preaches the sanctity of family life and then gives, from the Duce downwards, an example of covetousness and immorality? To fight—for what? For a war which has been wanted and fostered by that same privileged class which Nazi Germany found an easy prey to her methods of corrupt persuasion. A class which, through holding high position in the State and in the Party, has gained unexpected riches that can be enjoyed only with the perpetuation of a tyrannical régime. The origin of this sorrowful story goes back to the very daughter of the Duce, Countess Edda Ciano. All Rome knows that Edda has been the strongest influence upon her father, in making him take sides with Germany. Why? To revenge herself for the indifference with which London Society cold-shouldered Countess Edda Ciano when she visited London in the spring of 1934. Some months afterwards Countess Edda visited Berlin; and Nazi Germany received her like a Princess of Royal Blood, and even provided her with an official admirer in the person of handsome Rudolf Hess!

WHERE THE FASCIST DOCTRINE HAS FAILED

IT may sound strange to say that notwithstanding seventeen years of intensive and compulsory schooling the Italian people are not politically minded, at least not politically minded in the Fascist sense. The people are but little interested in the internal politics of other countries. Italians have remained in a political sense the staunchest believers in the policy of "live and let live." Moreover, the Italian people have not been taken in entirely, and even less are they convinced by the many theories expounded in the Fascist propaganda. In a European sense, the Fascist Foreign Policy has been too changeable ever to be convincing for the Italian people. And the Italians who are politically minded have not been slow to realise that the ascent of Nazi Germany has meant the decline of Fascist Italy, both in the West of Europe and in the Balkan and Danubian countries. Further, the Italians have realised that the ascent of Nazi Germany has meant the eclipse of Mussolini, has taken the thunder out of the Fascist Jupiter ; or, in poorer words, has pushed him from the rôle of first violin in

the European concerto to the place of second fiddle.

And yet, the Fascist régime has worked exceedingly hard to create in the Italians a political conscience, to instil the Italian people with the germ of that Imperialism—"that Imperial way of thinking"—which was the inspiring ambition of Mussolini. To reach this goal Fascism had devised and set up a vast and deep system of propaganda. There is nothing in Britain comparable to the propaganda machinery of the Fascist régime. British propaganda is, even at the present stage of the war, of the harmless type. It has as a motto, Truth against the Lie. But is it true that truth will always prevail? Judging by results, one would say that Fascism has been guided by a satanical mind, for it is easier to build a propaganda on lies than on plain truths. The "gilding of the pill" has been the mainspring of all Fascist propaganda for seventeen years. After all, it is a principle derived from the oldest and plainest psychological axiom: man, and the masses still more than the individual, are prone to be taken in by gilded lies; to swallow for gospel truths the most fantastic theories of political charlatanism. History of all ages is full of examples of this astonishing fact. From the market square of demagogical parliamentarianism to the rostrum of ancient

and the balcony of modern dictators, it is but an uninterrupted series of political pills proffered to the gullible crowd sugared and gilded with the promises of unattainable economic and political paradises ; and, at the bottom, what is the political faith of the universal masses if not the hope of solving in an easier way their individual and national budgets ?

To create this mirage, Fascism organised its propaganda systematically. Propaganda in Italy has been, for many years, developed to an art. It has taken from every régime all that was suited to the ends of Fascism, and strange to say its first model was Russian. Now it is German.

THE PROPAGANDA MACHINE

Apart from the Propaganda Department of the Fascist Party, directing and controlling the activities of all branches throughout the country, the machinery of State propaganda has been centralised by the Government in a Ministry, originally called outright Press and Propaganda, and now Germanised into "Ministry of Popular Culture," which directs and co-ordinates propaganda in all its spheres and activities : press, radio, cinema, books, theatre etc. It would be interesting to explain in detail the working of this vast and complex

machine, and to see how every single form of expression of the mind is vigilantly kept under constant control and restraint, and canalised into but one direction, so that the mind and senses of the people are shepherded into one mould only, be it the newspaper or the cinema or the radio or the theatre or the book. Even in the fields of the theatre and the book, which—pertaining, as they do, to the spheres of literature and the higher planes of thought—one would think might somehow escape, the inflexible rules of repression operate. There is no preventive censorship on books, but books have to be submitted to censorship before their actual issuing to the public, and the fear of suppression of published books is such that both authors and publishers alike are constantly mindful lest ideas or thoughts or theories, even in the purely literary or philosophical or historical fields, should incur the displeasure of the Censor; so much so that publishers have recourse to the safer rule of submitting their prospective books in proof-form, to avoid the heavy loss of having to withdraw and destroy a published work. In the theatre, authors must submit their plays to a Central Committee, which has a right of decision without appeal, and will allocate the plays to the various repertory companies. The same applies to the scenarios for films. Let us

add that the system is working terribly badly. The Italian stage is utterly ruined, because all sorts of themes and situations are forbidden, and banished are also translations of plays from countries with which the Fascist Government does not happen to be at any given moment in particular friendship. Whilst on the other hand, through the same political opportunism, endless numbers of plays are translated by Government orders from certain languages and produced, to foster "cultural relations": *vide* in recent years the case of Hungarian plays as against the banishment of French and English plays. (It is amusing to note that practically no German plays have been translated into Italian, for the simple reason that Nazi Germany has had no playwrights worthy of attention ever since the banishment of the Jews who represented real art in German culture.) In the film world, the central control has generated a racket of the gangster type. Artists and scenarios are imposed upon the producing companies, with the result that the Italian film industry finds itself unable to produce a single film suitable for the export market, and is utterly ruined. The news-reels are all produced by the "Luce" Company, a Government concern, and although the reels are photographically excellent, they are all so moulded in the same stamp, constantly

showing the Duce and Count Ciano and the Secretary of the Party and displays of juvenile organisations and similar topics, that the public is bored stiff with the Luce news-reels ; and the section of foreign news is so "doctored" as to deprive it of any interest and often to change completely its original significance.

THE CONTROL OVER THE PRESS

The best organisations are—from the technical point of view—the radio and the press, both of which speak with a single voice. The newspapers are divided, roughly speaking, into three categories : national papers, first-class provincials, and other small dailies and periodicals. The national papers—to which belong the Roman dailies and some of Turin and Milan—are actually private concerns, and each of them is allowed to work in keen competition with its rivals, but the soup is always the same, all that changes is the name ! In fact, the Press Ministry controls and directs completely both the home and foreign policy of the newspapers. Let it be said that the control is much more strict and direct in matters of internal affairs than in the field of foreign policy : the reason—as we have already mentioned—being that often the Press Bureau itself is at a loss as to what

instructions to give, and a waiting attitude is adopted until it can be seen from the messages of the correspondents in the foreign capitals what the trend of the situation may be—which accounts for the often contradictory interpretations in the foreign messages of the various newspaper correspondents. Palazzo Chigi may suddenly take a hand, and then the chorus of the official commentators divulges His Master's Voice. But in internal affairs, instructions are issued daily to all newspapers—in Rome, directly; outside Rome, through the Press Officers of the Provincial Prefectures—and these instructions range from the order to display over the whole front page the speech which the Duce is going to make that day, or to give emphasis to the visit of the Party Secretary to an exhibition, or to give praise to an art show, or to ignore a certain book, or to stop writing articles about the suffering caused by the winter. The result is that the Italian newspapers show such a striking appearance of being all alike, that the only difference is in the efforts to compete in the literary page, which is the only page that the Italian reader finds of any real interest. This applies to all papers, but it mostly concerns the big dailies. All the other small papers are more or less "bulletins" or "organs" of the local provincial Fascio, and are either run by the Party

or have been acquired, under compulsion, by one or other of the big dailies, and are, therefore, run on the chain system and fed with news and articles which have already appeared in the controlling paper.

This state of affairs has brought about an incredible attitude of submission on the part of the newspaper proprietors, and even more on the part of the journalists, who know that they would be instantly sacked if they should dare to give the proprietors cause for reprimand by the authorities. It has become, in the newspaper world more than in any other section of life in Italy, a question of applying the Italian saying, "Either eat this gruel or jump out of the window." And, perhaps, when there is no choice and no alternative, one must understand and excuse the Italian journalists for having adapted themselves to the life of Court chroniclers, always dipping their pen into an inkpot of superlative praise, or of despicable contempt for their Master's opponents. Besides, Mussolini has been clever enough to grant the journalists a charter, which should, indeed, be a model to the whole world. Under this "Journalists' National Contract" no journalist can be dismissed by the newspaper proprietors without being paid a compensation equal to six months' salary plus one month for every year of service; this in-

creasing compensation becomes automatic when the journalist reaches sixty years of age or twenty-five years of professional service (even if with different papers); and with this goes a compulsory insurance, the premium of which—eight per cent. of the salary—is paid three-eighths by the journalist and five-eighths by the newspaper proprietors, and is augmented by a bonus granted by the Treasury of thirty thousand lire.

A PORTRAIT OF DR. GAYDA

The absolute subservience of the newspapers has brought about a competition among the big dailies to jockey for the position of "official mouthpiece" of Mussolini or Count Ciano or some other of the more powerful members of the Party. It is in this way that the foreign press has grown accustomed, as an instance, to the names of Gayda and Ansaldo. It may cause surprise to read that Gayda, whom the foreign press has nicknamed "Mussolini's mouthpiece," is not Mussolini's mouthpiece; he is not even an old Fascist "of the first hour." More, this political writer, who has written innumerable articles in support of the most untenable claims of Fascism and has expounded policies which have, in the course of time, proved contradictory, is not a man of deep faith, even less

a man capable of enthusiasm. Gayda is purely a writing slot-machine.

An interesting and pleasant person in private life, with refined tastes and artistic leanings, a very good pianist of classic taste, and a collector of paintings, Dr. Virginio Gayda—whose regular features prove elusive to the pencil of the cartoonist—retires as often as he can to his beautiful villa at Capri. He is indifferent to sports, but rather fond of bridge, and in Rome there are laughing whispers of “the ugly intellectual beauties of Gayda.” He is also notoriously avaricious. This avaricious trait explains many aspects of his attitude as a political writer. No one could deny that Gayda is a most able writer. He may lack the polish and elegance of phrasing of other political journalists; his articles are dry and deprived of any enlightening humour; but he is an excellent casuist and most able at setting out his arguments; indeed, the way in which he handles his arguments and builds up his subjects on plausible facts is one of the reasons for the notoriety his writings have achieved; the other more important reason being the belief that he is Mussolini’s mouth-piece, which he is not.

At least, not in an absolute and official sense. Mussolini would never think of entrusting his own personal thoughts and ideas

to the pen of any man, however clever that writer might be. Let us not forget that Mussolini has remained, in the inner self of his personality, a political journalist. Moreover, Mussolini has his own newspaper, the *Popolo d'Italia*, which is not only his own property but also the official organ of the Fascist Party. The *Popolo d'Italia* is Mussolini's personal mouthpiece ; and in the *Popolo d'Italia* Mussolini speaks for himself, writing his own articles in his own characteristic and forceful style. Every political journalist in Italy, whether Italian or foreign correspondent, has learnt to recognise those unsigned articles in the *Popolo d'Italia*, which, in any case, are always pre-announced in the press and are, by order, reproduced by every Italian newspaper. Gayda, therefore, is merely one of the inspired writers for the Italian Foreign Office ; and Gayda writes as per instructions received from the Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or from the Press Ministry. From day to day Gayda is called to one or the other of the two Press Bureaux, and there he is given illumination upon the subjects which he is asked to write about. The illumination is always accompanied by ample material on which to support the subject, and this may explain to the non-initiated the otherwise surprising knowledge of Gayda on all sorts

of subjects, and the even more exceptional range of facts and quotations from all sources, Italian and foreign, that Gayda appears to have at his finger-tips. Gayda is no more encyclopædic than any well read and competent writer on international affairs, but he has the advantage of having at his disposal the Research and Reference Bureau of the Italian Press Ministry, where all the daily and weekly reports sent by the Press Attachés in the Embassies abroad are collected and filed, and where a specialised staff reads and translates and files all important publications, political, military and technical, which are received from foreign countries. In this way, when the Italian Foreign Office—or, shall we say, Mussolini himself—suggests that it would be opportune that Gayda should write a series of articles upon a given subject, the Press Ministry can supply Gayda with a mass of first-class material that makes the foreign reader wonder at such precise knowledge.

It has suited Mussolini's policy to let the world believe that Gayda is his mouthpiece, although more than once Gayda's articles have been disowned by the Italian Foreign Office, whenever it suited the political game. But it has equally suited Gayda to progress in his career with such an official halo, and he has thrived handsomely. Not having attained the summit of his legitimate ambi-

tions, Gayda had to be content with making money, and to appear as a sort of demi-god of journalism. Gayda's ambition was to be made a Senator. It was not an impossible ambition. Several other well-known journalists have, in past and recent times, been created Senators. But not Gayda. After the Abyssinian War, when titles and orders were distributed lavishly, everyone expected that Gayda—who fought so hard with his pen against Britain—would be made a Senator. He was not. He was given the Cross of Civil Merit of Savoy, an honour comparable with the Order of Merit, but a very different thing in the public eye from being Senator Virginio Gayda. The reason? The Fascist Party blackballed him. Gayda's shirt is not considered sufficiently black for the good books of the Party. Another reason is that Gayda is very much disliked by the intellectuals of the Fascist generation. This example may suffice. Once Gayda was lecturing to the students of the Faculty of Journalism. Half-way through the lecture, one student got up and asked Gayda if he could explain why, a few months before, in his articles in the *Giornale d'Italia* he had supported a policy completely different from the one he was now expounding. Gayda asked to be allowed to explain this at the following lecture. At the next lecture there was an organised concert

of booing and catcalls. Gayda never lectured again to the young intellectuals.

In such an atmosphere, and with the secret knowledge that he has bitter opponents in the high circles of the Party, Gayda must perforce be content to sit as a pundit in his huge editorial room (every boss in Italy must have a huge Mussolinian office), and let the world believe that he is "Mussolini's mouth-piece," while he writes perfectly constructed articles on the subjects that are given him by his masters. Whenever he can, he goes to his villa at Capri. There the daily messages from the correspondents in London and Paris are, in normal times, read over the telephone to him from the Rome head office, so that Gayda may be acquainted with the latest views; and when his article is composed, a secretary telephones it from Capri to Rome. A rather complicated and semi-dictatorial way of writing a "leader." It happens that when the article appears, something in it displeases the bosses, and Gayda must hurry back to Rome and eat humble pie. In newspaper circles in Rome the following story is told of him. One day he had received instructions to write a very violent article against, shall we say, Daladier. Gayda wrote the article, and was just reading over the script when the telephone rang: "Press Bureau here. About that Daladier article.

We think that it will be better to make it a markedly friendly article. See to it." Gayda put aside his violent attack, inserted a fresh sheet in the typewriter, and proceeded calmly and diligently to write a markedly friendly article, in the same argumentative and convincing style. This story about Gayda is, indeed, the epitome of the whole Fascist press as interpreter of the Fascist policy.

A DECEPTIVE FOREIGN POLICY

Fascism had tried for a long time to present to the Italians a picture of an old, decrepit England, cracked by age and worm-eaten by plutodemocracy ; an insignificant island, for which the narrow belt of the sea no longer afforded protection against an invading army having supremacy in the air. Great care was taken to leave out of the picture the very different aspect that the matter offered from a naval point of view. When sea power came under discussion, it was shouted louder and louder that the maritime power of Great Britain no longer existed—that it was a myth exploded by the German Air Force.

The attitude and policy of the Western Democracies—especially of Great Britain and the U.S.A.—have been constantly misinterpreted to the Italian people. It was the tragedy of the democracies to appear weaker

than they are, and the spectacle of a slowly arming Britain and a neutrality-obsessed America played a considerable part in encouraging the totalitarian States to risk war.

More than everything else, it was maintained to the Italian people that America would "never again" intervene on this side of the Atlantic. America had no possessions or direct interests in Europe, and on the Pacific side there was the Japanese bogey to keep the U.S.A. in their place. It was said that Americans did not have, in fact did not understand, idealism in the European and even less the totalitarian sense. "America—it used to be said—is a country of many races with great and diverse sectional elements that could never be brought together to fight a war for Europe." Nobody, of course, ever mentioned that the Americans could be brought together to fight a war for America.

The whole of this web of Fascist propaganda spread over the Italian people, was supported on premises that did not have one single thread of logic; on arguments that could not resist the simplest analysis of common sense. And yet many people would say it succeeded. No, it did not succeed. The Italian people did not believe one-half of the Fascist preaching and propaganda. But what could they do to oppose it? Do not blame the Italian

people. The Italian people and the Fascist régime are two different and separate things. But when every shred of liberty has been wrested away from the citizens, how can they react ? Did the Czechs react ? Are the Dutch, the Belgians, the French revolting ? Revolt may be in the heart of the people, but where are the weapons with which to fight the oppressor who is trampling upon their neck ?

The Italian people did not—or at least did not always—believe the Fascist preaching. They were conscious that the arguments sounded hollow. More, they were conscious that the preaching meant only one thing—that the Fascist and Nazi régimes were strong and invincible and the Democracies were just the prey destined to be crushed and seized by the totalitarians. But why, the Italian people were asking in their conscience, and for what reason should we jump upon them ? It is true that the present world is nothing but a shameless division of “ have and have-not ”; but have the recent wars helped to redress the injustice ?

Another thing struck the Italian people between the eyes, and it was that from the policy of justice and readjustment preached and carried out by Germany in Europe, the only party gaining anything was Germany, and Germany alone. The disappointment of

Italy after Munich was immense, although softened by the joy that war had been averted. Not even the régime could cover that disappointment. I was in Rome at the end of March, 1939, when, after Prague, Memel was seized: instructions were issued to the papers to reduce the news to an inconspicuous item, as the Fascist Government was ashamed to tell the Italian people that the glorious partner of the Axis had snatched another "pacific conquest," leaving Italy out in the cold again. The rape of Albania, coming soon afterwards, was in great part meant to appease that disappointment.

Another undeniable fact is that the Italian people have gradually lost interest and faith in the foreign policy of the Fascist régime. In fact, the Fascist foreign policy has been a most surprising affair of constant change. Mussolini—a great realist, which means a man devoid of idealism—said that only mountains are unmovable, but men and policies change and must adapt themselves to circumstances. He has certainly changed and adapted himself to circumstances until the day when he has been able to force circumstances in Italy to be adapted to his personal will. But what has been the foreign policy of Fascism? Let us take two instances: the relations with the Western Powers and the Danubian policy.

The South-East of Europe was the only European field in which Italy might have played an influential part, both economic and political. Yet the relations between Italy and the Danubian countries have been, during the last twenty years, oscillating to a degree. With Yugoslavia those relations passed from hostility to friendship. At the end of 1920 Nikola Pasic and Count Sforza settled the dispute left open by the Peace Conference, with the Rapallo Compromise. In 1922 Mussolini did not have the courage to disavow the Agreement, and in 1924 he confirmed it. But in 1933 the relations between Italy and Yugoslavia were again at their worst. Mussolini was then planning his Four Power Pact, and at that time Gayda in the *Giornale d'Italia* was demanding the partition of Yugoslavia. The assassination of King Alexander in October '34 seemed to be propitious; but the death of the King rallied the Yugoslavians, and less than three years later Italy and Yugoslavia entered a new phase of their relations. In March, 1937, Count Ciano signed a new Pact of Friendship with the Yugoslavian Prime Minister Stojadinovich. It was a pact contrary to the Little Entente Pact of 1933, which made all bilateral pacts with a State not a member of the Entente subject to the unanimous approval of the Council of the Entente. At present

the relations of Italy and Yugoslavia are dependent on the will of Germany.

The same oscillating trend can be seen in the relations of Fascist Italy with all Central and South-Eastern European countries. The attitude towards Austria was typical. In 1934 Mussolini rose as the defender of Austria's independence, appointing himself guardian to the widow and children of the murdered Dr. Dolfuss. In 1937 he stood passive, and in a speech that convinced nobody tried to explain to the Italian Parliament and to the world that he, Mussolini, had been informed beforehand of Germany's march on Vienna. (Let it, however, be said that no one could expect Italy to start a war against Germany for the seizure of Austria when London and Paris were shamefully endeavouring to justify the aggression.) The policy of the Rome Protocols, which had taken ten years to build, was utterly stultified by the advance of Germany into Austria, and by her unflinching policy of expansion towards her South-Eastern *Lebensraum*.

What about the policy of Italy with the great Western Powers? Since 1918 Italy had ranged herself on that political and diplomatic front which was the continuation of the old Allied Front and seemed to be the only bulwark of Western Europe against a resurrecting Germany. Mussolini, who—it

must be admitted—had the vision of a new Germany, tried to maintain that order by suggesting the admission of the new Germany into the comity of the Western Countries, or rather of the former Allies ; and his Four Power Pact was an amplification of the narrow and limited Locarno. The Four Power Pact was pooh-poohed by Britain and France ; and the result has been that Europe, instead of seeing the unity of the four great western nations, saw, in 1937, the division of Europe into two armed camps. Britain and France ranged into one and Italy ranged on the side of Germany into the other. The division was then described as a division of " ideologies," but it was a clear foretaste of the military alliances of the future European War.

Yet the Italian people were not convinced. The complexities of Balkan and Danubian policies escaped the understanding of the ordinary man, but the new ranging of Italy on the side of Germany was looked upon with undisguised dismay and alarm. To the ordinary citizen, to the millions of men who had fought in the other war, it meant the disowning of all they had fought for. It was easy for the Fascist propagandists to make a " *distinguo* " between Austria and Germany, and to explain that Italy had never had any quarrel with Germany, and to resurrect

forgotten letters of Bismarck : for the Italian people it was nevertheless difficult to understand. Not even the ideological affinities of the two régimes were a convincing argument, because Nazism was evolving along lines which were every day more repulsive to the feelings of every decent-minded Italian. Besides, there was the instinct of the people, and instinct is something that no dictator and no propaganda can thwart or suffocate : and the instinctive feeling of the Italians was anti-German. In the Italian language, the word German covers both the Huns and the Austrians ; and the Risorgimento Wars had been fought against the Germans of Austria, and the wars of centuries past had been fought against the Huns both of Germany and Austria !

THE SENTIMENT OF THE PEOPLE WAS ANTI-GERMAN.

Moreover, the instinct of the people was turning sympathetically towards the west, to France and Britain. France and England had been hard, very hard on Italy at the Peace Conference of 1919 ; France and England had been too slow in recognising the good intentions of Fascism in the early years of the régime, and later they had misunderstood the determination of the Italian people

to achieve something through the ruthless régime which they were patiently enduring ; yet, the French and the British were nice people; people one could always understand. The French were so near and so similar to the people of Northern Italy ; and because of that affinity there were so often bickerings between them, for is it not a common thing for sisters to quarrel in the doorway ? And the English also were nice people ; so rich and so well-mannered that it was a pleasure to have them visiting the country and to have business with them. And had they not been friends since time immemorial ? Whilst the Germans ! Rough, nasty, bullying people. As tourists as well as in business. And when, through the increasing " collaboration " of the two régimes, Nazi Germany began to send to Italy wave after wave of her " Strength through Joy " parties, the disgust of the Italian people knew no limit. The German visitors were the worst lot one could wish to see in Italy. The hotel trade dreaded the parties they could not refuse, the waiters considered them worse than locusts, visitors who travelled on coupons only, even the tips paid in coupons, even the wines and drinks ! There was, in the spring of 1938, a shipment of " Strength through Joy " that visited Naples : the two thousand or so German tourists bought even the postcards, even

their souvenirs, on board ship so as not to spend any money in the country they visited ! German tourists were pointed out by waiters in hotels and dining-rooms as one would point out a leper. Now and then a head waiter would tell you confidentially that some were selling a piece of jewellery or a camera to procure some cash.

The visit of Hitler to Italy in 1938 put the finishing touch to the popular feeling. The enormous sum expended by the Treasury was in large part spent to organise a display that would hide the complete absence of popular interest and enthusiasm. The most crude specimens of witticisms got in circulation during the visit, and the jokes were often whispered by high officials who enjoyed the rude thrusts at the mighty friend one did not like. One of the best stories was this : One night Mussolini took Hitler for a drive in his little private two-seater, to show Hitler the sights of Rome. They passed the fountain of Trevi, and Mussolini told Hitler that if you throw a penny in the water you are sure to return to Rome. Hitler rattled the coins in his pocket. "No fear," said Mussolini, and let the clutch in. And this other : In Florence a road was being opened up, and a passer-by asked a workman : "What are you breaking up the road for ?" "We are looking for the Axis." A few days afterwards the workmen

were mending the hole in the road, and the citizen asked again: "Did you find the Axis?" "No," said the workman, "but they found it round the corner, in the Via del Malcontento." One more detail of that visit. It is not generally known that on the occasion of Hitler's visit, Crown Prince Humbert was frantic, not only because Hitler had insisted on his pet photographer, Herr Hoffman, having a seat at the State Dinner—no such breach of etiquette had ever occurred at the Italian Court—but also because he had to give up his private apartment at the Quirinal Palace as no other apartment was considered good enough for the Führer. When the apartment was ready, the head of the Chancellery's Ceremonial went to Rome to satisfy himself that everything was in order; and this gentleman had the impudence to ask that the bedspread be changed and another made of special brocade with an enormous German eagle embroidered on it. The new bedspread had to be ordered and made. The story was told me by the Prince's personal secretary, who added that the bedspread had cost nearly 16,000 lire, and had to be paid for by the Prince as it pertained to his apartments. "What is the Prince going to do with it?" I asked. "Do with it? He has ordered it to be burned."

THE HOLLOWNESS OF FASCIST IMPERIALISM

The counterpart of the unconvincing foreign policy was the propaganda for an Italian Imperialism, which meant war. The Abyssinian War showed that Fascism was not ripe for a war. Mussolini's wish was that this first war of colonial conquest—the first imperial war of Fascism, as the propaganda had described it—should be entirely a Fascist war. A Blackshirts' War. Not without reason all the high hierarchs—Ciano, Starace, Teruzzi—had considered it expedient to volunteer for East Africa, to do something spectacular. The Chief appointed to the expeditionary army, Marshal De Bono, had been chosen by Mussolini from among the "Quadrupviri," the Four Leaders of the March on Rome. Very soon Mussolini had to realise that the captains of Fascism were worth but little, and the Blackshirt Legions were not so heroic as Mussolini had imagined them and described them to the world. It became necessary to recall the Fascist Proconsul. Marshal De Bono returned to Rome to busy himself writing his Commentaries "De Bello Æthiopico" that he had been unable to win. To win the war Mussolini had to climb down from the Fascist height and entrust the command to an Army man, Marshal Badoglio. Worse still, Mussolini had to rely solely on

the regular Army. The G.H.Q. passed from the wide room at the Palazzo Venezia to the tent of the Chief of the Army.

This was, in the eyes of the whole of the Italian people, the first great failure of Fascism. Nevertheless, the Abyssinian War ended in a great victory for Mussolini. The founding of the Italian East African Empire marked the boom of Mussolini's shares. The Abyssinian War had been won by Mussolini against the greatest of odds. It had, indeed, been possible for Fascist propaganda to boast that the war had been won against fifty-two nations. The Sanctions against Italy had given rise to unprecedented manifestations of patriotic feelings ; they had, in fact, operated the miracle of rallying, for the moment, the whole of the Italian nation around Mussolini.

The Sanctions had, furthermore, the tragic effect of breaking for ever the common front that had existed in the west of Europe since 1915, and gave Fascism the opportunity to abandon the traditional collaboration with Britain. Fascism and the democracies were certainly odd fellows to sleep for ever in the same political bed ; and Sanctions gave a golden opportunity for the parting.

The Abyssinian question should never have been allowed to arise. When the late Ramsay MacDonald and Sir John Simon went to Stresa in 1935, they returned without having

said a word to Mussolini about Abyssinia. Why? Grandi, then Ambassador in London, had been called on purpose to Stresa. Nothing happened. In Italian circles it was said that when Mussolini tried to bring the subject on the carpet, MacDonald—always afraid of spoiling the “success” of a Conference—replied that the Abyssinian question was not on the agenda.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that the enmity of Mussolini towards Britain and France commenced with the Abyssinian quarrel, and was sealed and delivered by Sanctions. Mussolini never forgot and never forgave. All the ensuing European policy of Fascism was dictated by that desire for vengeance.

Mussolini went into the Spanish War as a vengeance against Sanctions. At that time it was easy for Fascist propaganda to affirm that, after the failure of Sanctions and the inability of Great Britain and France to do anything more than promote a Committee of Non-Intervention, Italy could dare anything, unimpaired. In January, 1937, the author had a conversation with Count Ciano in Rome, soon after the signing of the unfortunate Gentlemen's Agreement. The new Italian Foreign Minister asked him point blank this question: “If I send an expeditionary force to Spain, what do you think London will do?”

It was also at that time that the so-called politically minded young Fascists developed the theory that a Fascist Spain would prove a strategical base against France and Britain in the future war that Italy and Germany would fight against the plutodemocracies.

The Alliance of Mussolini with Hitler commenced, potentially, in March, 1936, when Nazi troops entered the Rhineland, and France and Britain found it impossible to enforce the Locarno Pact, not only because neither had the slightest intention of fighting, but because Italy refused to support either, in view of Sanctions.

From Spain to the European War, passing through Munich and the Alliance with Germany, the step for Mussolini was inevitable, even if it was against the wish of the Italian people. And yet, Mussolini knows only too well that Nazism has destroyed every vestige and ideal of freedom, such as Europe has known for the last hundred and fifty years, and such as men of the older generations in Italy still consider their creed and their right. Mussolini also knows that Hitler has not only defeated Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium and France, but that he is trying to impose on Europe a new form of government, social and economic, from which Fascist Italy could not escape, and which would be tantamount to making

Italy a German Dependency. Mussolini also realises that Berlin nowadays treats him with the same contempt that Berlin showed for Austria in the other war, and that he has lost every chance to make the world—or the Italians, for that matter—believe that he has any say in the conduct of the war or the destinies of Europe.

This is the very tragedy of Mussolini—to know that he has brought Italy to a war out of which there is to be no victory for the Italian people, but only a position of hopeless submission to a German domination. Nor will it be possible for Mussolini to save himself and his political structure by a dramatic *volte-face*, which would in any case only bring him and Fascism to their doom, either at the hands of Nazi Germany or of the Italian people. During 1938 Dr. Guido Zernatto, Austrian Foreign Secretary under Chancellor Schuschnigg, published in *Candide* a series of Memoirs, in the course of which he gave extracts from his diaries of the fateful interviews that Chancellor Schuschnigg had with Hitler at Berchtesgaden. The diaries read as follows: "The Federal Chancellor (Schuschnigg) again tried to speak; again Hitler interrupted him: 'I know, I know . . . you are thinking of Mussolini. I am full of admiration for his person and his work, and I act on the assumption of complete

solidarity between Fascism and National Socialism. But the military capacity of the Italians is another question. Entertain no illusions on the subject. If Mussolini wished to help, which will certainly not be the case, all we should have to do would be to dispatch an army of one hundred thousand Germans to chase the Italians not only from the Brenner but as far as Naples.' Schuschnigg said that he would feel obliged to send to Rome a detailed report of their conversation. Hitler, at this, banged the table with his fist, and shouted: 'Mussolini! Mussolini! Tell him, if you like, tell him what I think of his army!' Chancellor Schuschnigg sent a report of this meeting to Rome."

Mussolini is a man of strong susceptibilities. Is it possible to imagine that Mussolini has cancelled from his mind the words reported to him by Chancellor Schuschnigg?

The Italians are only too much awake to this situation. Moreover, they realise two things: the first is that the new order which Hitler has in mind to impose in Europe would share the Continent with Italy and Spain and Russia only in name, but in practise it would mean an unchallengeable German hegemony. The second thing is that, so far—that is to say, even without waiting for

the great Axis victory—the problem of Fascist Italy, which was the Mediterranean problem, or the freedom of the *Mare Nostrum*, is far from getting solved in favour of Italy, and the increasing hold of Germany on the whole of the Atlantic seaboard, from Narvik to Dakar, added to the Fascist defeats in Africa, only means that Italy is much more securely prisoner in the Mediterranean than she ever was before entering the war, and in a sense which never existed before. In the past, Fascism protested that Italy was a prisoner in her own sea ; now the Italians are asking what exactly they are going to be. And with the latest trend of the war, all the Fascist propaganda seems to the Italians to have gone wrong. The colossal resistance of Great Britain has made it unavoidable to drop the boast of the too-often-postponed invasion ; the compact solidarity of the British Empire has compelled Italian as well as German propaganda to declare that the Empire, which had taken centuries to build, cannot be destroyed in a few months ! There remains one argument for the Axis propaganda, and that is that, to avoid peace with the Nazis, Great Britain will allow herself to be absorbed by the U.S.A. ; but can anyone imagine that this argument will convince the Italian people ?

THE PROBLEM OF THE TEN MILLION ITALIANS
ABROAD

Another problem which is perplexing the Italian minds is that of the U.S.A. The Italians have by now fully realised that the United States intends to co-operate with Britain against Nazism and Fascism to the extent of war. The Italians have the greatest respect for the value of American intervention in the European War. Nobody in Italy, except the youngsters of the Fascist generation, has forgotten the immense drive, the irresistible impulse to victory that was represented by the intervention in 1917. From another point of view the American intervention concerns and worries Italy: and that is from the point of view of the many millions of Italians in the United States and in the South American Republics. If America intervenes (and the intervention of the U.S.A. implies, spiritually, also the taking sides of the South American Republics), what will be the attitude of all those millions of Italians? It took Fascism more than ten years of intensive propaganda and delicate political manœuvring to convert the Italians of the two Americas, and principally those of the U.S.A., to Fascism. But the Italians of the United States are, before anything else, American citizens. Their homes, their

businesses, their very lives, are American. It was in view of this that Mussolini devised and negotiated with the American Government the dual nationality; but the passport remained American. It only meant that those Italo-American citizens gave their sympathies to Mussolini, and sent their savings more liberally to Italy, those "emigrants' remittances" which are so important to Italy as to rank with the "invisible exports" in the balance sheet of national economy. It is obvious that the moment the United States takes a more active part in the war against the tyrannical forces of Nazism and Fascism, those millions of so-called Italo-Americans will declare themselves one hundred per cent. American. At a stroke, those remittances will be lost to the Fascist Treasury and to the Fascist political structure. No longer there will be heard in Italy the voice of a Fiorello La Guardia who, in 1917, was carried throughout Italy speaking his patriotic fervour in the name of all the Americans of Italian origin who had joined the American Legion.

The Italians of the United States, and, indeed, all the Italians outside Italy constitute a field where Mussolini and Fascism are particularly vulnerable. It may surprise many readers to learn that there are ten million Italians abroad, and nearly eight million of them live in North and South

America. After that, the largest groups are in France, in Tunis, in Britain, in Egypt ; and it is worthy of note that the community in Germany is practically nil, if one excepts the compulsory transfers of agricultural and industrial workers.

A brilliant beam of propaganda towards the many millions of Italians abroad would make an indirect line of attack comparable to the submarine warfare whereby Hitler hopes to beat Britain by cutting off supplies from the British people. Any reaction of the Italians abroad to this campaign for freedom would be of vital importance in the battle against Fascism. Let us have this quite clear : if it is true that the Italian people in Italy are potentially ready for a revolt, the Italians living outside Italy can be counted among the automatic allies of Britain ; for the Italians abroad have not the same susceptibility and the same political consciousness as the Italians in Italy, and their conception of Italy and of the political value and prestige of Italy is on a different plane. Furthermore, their whole life is envisaged within the social frame and political atmosphere of the country where they have elected to live and of which they have absorbed the outlook and conceptions. The opposition of the Italians abroad to Mussolini's war would strike the Fascist structure in the spinal cord,

because the Italians abroad represent for Fascist Italy a great and profound problem ; a problem of a nature such as does not, perhaps, exist for Nazi Germany.

THE ECONOMIC HANDICAP

Mussolini, like Hitler, may sneer at the mention of the three Generals—Revolution, Hunger and Winter—but they will come and will not be his allies ; and Mussolini knows that the Italian people dread the prospect of a long war.

The Naval blockade will starve Europe. Mussolini's propaganda goes on telling the Italians that this is a new "crime" by Britain. But the Italian people know that Italy would not have been blockaded if Mussolini had not gone to war. Indeed, the subject of the blockade was, for many months before Mussolini took the plunge, a very convenient item of propaganda against Britain. "The blockade"—they used to say—"is strangling Italy and the Italian trade. Britain is, through the Naval Blockade, again applying Sanctions against Italy ; forcing our political hand by blackmail." The Italian Press Attaché at the London Embassy used to lecture me day after day about the misdeeds of the blockade. A certain statement of affairs, addressed by an Italian bank

abroad to the Bank of Italy in Rome, had been taken out by the mail censorship, and for what purpose? An official document from the Governor in Asmara, Eritrea, to the Government in Rome was abducted during the inspection at Port Said. The Italian Press Attaché never stopped to think that, should ever such documents have been of interest to the British, they could have been photographed in transit without going to the childish trouble of seizing them and letting all the world know it!

But what the Italian people were not told—what the Italian correspondents in London were “advised” not to send—was that the British Government was ready at any time to make the Naval Contraband Control non-existent for Italy. My own messages—which were not always strictly obedient to instructions—were day after day pruned by Gayda to the extent of making them quite unrecognisable, to the great amusement of the Chief Censor in Room 43, who was, with me, comparing the published messages with the original script on record.

And what will be, in the not very long run, the effect of the blockade on Italy? Without going into a minute analysis of the economic situation of Italy, it is a well-known fact that Italy is less suited economically than any other Power for carrying on a long

war with Great Britain. For most of her raw materials Italy is dependent on supplies which come through Gibraltar, Suez and the Dardanelles ; and this is particularly true of the raw materials vitally needed for making war. Taking the figures of 1938, we have, for the main commodities, the following figures :

	Raw Cotton	Raw Wool	Iron Ore	Steel Scrap	Crude Oil
Total Imports (in '000 Quintals) -	1,571	326	4,006	6,040	14,742
Of this total : From beyond Suez, Gibraltar and Dardanelles - - -	1,537	305	2,829	5,162	13,687

As regards petroleum, it is a fact that intensive drilling has failed to reveal any large supplies in Italy proper ; indeed, output fell from 26,500 tons in 1933 to 13,200 tons in 1938, and was only 5,700 tons in the first half of 1939, less than half per cent. of Italy's peace-time domestic requirements, which amount to 2,500,000 tons a year, while the Italian Navy and merchant ships took probably another one million tons a year in peace-time, and in war the needs would be considerably greater. Albanian production has risen from 4,000 tons in 1935 to 140,000

tons in 1939, and it is scheduled to reach 300,000 tons. This may be reached in the future, but it will take a long time, and even 300,000 tons would only be 8·9 per cent. of all Italy's requirements. At the beginning of the war, in 1939, Italian stocks were practically nil.

As regards coal, Italy consumes about 12 million tons of coal a year in peace-time. In 1938 coal imports (11·9 million tons) came chiefly from Germany (seven million) and countries now under German control, and the great bulk came by sea. Now Germany is unavoidably compelled to deliver to Italy twelve million tons of coal by rail; without this guarantee Italy would probably have been unable to declare war.

As regards rubber and fibres, Italy is the world's second largest producer of hemp, but she has no rubber and no cotton. When Mussolini entered the war, Italy had about four months' supply of rubber in hand, and there are indications that she is now gravely concerned about the position. The food supplies are not encouraging, with the harvest of 1940 one million tons short of the previous year. The same can be said of fertilisers, as the Autarky has not made Italy independent of potash and phosphates.

The conclusion is that Italy has not the industrial capacity to support a long war.

and Italian manufacturing capacity is weak compared with that of all other first-class Powers. Once Italian stocks are used up, Italy's vulnerability to economic pressure will make her a total liability to her German partner.

It is a well-known fact that during the 1914-18 War, the blockade was one of the determining factors for the entry of Italy into the War on the side of the Allies. In March, 1915, Italy was entirely dependent on the good will of the Allies for the free passage of imports from overseas. The economic position of Italy has certainly been improved by the Fascist Government. But the so much vaunted Autarky (economic self-sufficiency) is a practical joke for the man in the street, when it is not a cause of despair to the industrialists who are, in the name of Autarky, compelled to curtail their activities. What has Autarky produced? A large number of activities have been laid down on paper; many more were started, and some of them might, one day, prove quite successful. But what are they? *Ersatz*. Nothing more than *Ersatz*.

The plundering of European countries by Germany will not save Italy from starvation; and Germany is not likely to be very generous in sharing with Italy the spoils of plunder, which Germany needs so badly herself. Nor

will Italy be saved by the suits made of milk, or by the campaign to wear shorts and discard ties and hats !

The accusation that Britain is starving Europe for selfish and imperialistic motives is now very thin, and no Italian of common sense can be deceived when Italy herself has been dragged in the abyss for motives which have been blatantly announced as purely imperialistic.

THE CATASTROPHE OF THE RÉGIME

Mussolini's war has now lasted less than nine months, and its development has produced, some extraordinary results. We witnessed, soon after Mussolini's declaration of war in June, 1940, the occupation of British Somaliland, which indicated that Mussolini was in urgent need of an easy victory, even at the expense of repudiating his famous dictum that he was not a collector of deserts ; but when in 1935 he had said those words, Mussolini was still the proud and confident overlord of Europe, whilst in 1940 the Somaliland desert had to be dressed up with the "strategical importance" of the small port of Berbera where, so far, Mussolini has no means of sending his ships except by making them fly.

Then, Graziani's army moved against Egypt, reaching Sidi Barrani ; and for an anxious lapse of time it looked as if Mussolini might be able to press the African end of the Axis pincers planned to close on Suez and the Middle East.

But suddenly the situation took an almost

fantastic turn. Mussolini attacked Greece, and suffered such an unexpected and overwhelming defeat that it may turn him out of Albania ; and in Northern Africa, General Wavell has inflicted upon Graziani's army such a lightning attack that over one-half of the Fascist armies in Libya have already been taken captive, and after the fall of Bardia and of Tobruk and of Benghazi, Tripoli is now awaiting a similar fate. Mussolini's African defeat, together with the Albanian disaster and the pounding of the Fleet Air Arm at Taranto and Naples, and the astounding feat of the bombardment of Genoa, sounds for all purposes like the death-knell of the Fascist régime.

But writing as an Italian who cannot bring himself to believe that the military defeat is due to the cowardice of the Italian troops, is it not reasonable to suggest that all these military events stand out to prove that the Italian Army is losing the war because the heart of the men is not in it ? Looking at this tragic situation against the background of the spiritual and material conditions existing in Italy on the very eve of the war, I say that the defeats of Libya and of Albania are not a catastrophe for the Italian people, but solely a catastrophe for Fascism ; and I give three reasons for it : the clash of the Militia with the Regular Army, the failure of the

régime to prepare for war, and the anti-German feeling of the Italian people.

THE CLASH OF THE ARMY AND THE MILITIA

The creation of the Fascist Militia and the superimposition of the Militia upon the Regular Army generated in the military organism of Italy an incurable malady. The Militia was devised originally for Party purposes. Only in later years did Mussolini decide to use the Militia as a second army parallel to the Regular Army. Nevertheless, the Militia has always remained in its essence and in its character what it was originally intended to be: a private army of the Fascist Party, utterly unsuitable to be amalgamated with the Regular Army of the conscripted people. The Militiamen have remained the "Musketeers of the Cardinal," as opposed to the "Guards of the King," with the same antagonism, the same clashes. The officers of the Army found it belittling to be reduced to saluting a young swaggerer of the Militia holding a superior rank obtained because of the absurd composition of the Militia. In later years, when Mussolini entered his phases of nefarious wars, the officers of the Regular Army discovered that the officers of the Militia had, as their first duty, the despicable task of spying on them.

As a combative army the Militia has proved a colossal failure. We have already mentioned the Abyssinian War, when Marshal De Bono had to be suddenly withdrawn and the conduct of the campaign placed in the hands of Marshal Badoglio, the command thus passing from the Duce's room in the Palazzo Venezia to the tent of a real soldier. De Bono retired to Rome to write his Commentaries "De Bello Æthiopico"; and at that time, in the cafés of Rome and Milan it used to be said jokingly—for, notwithstanding all the terrorism, the régime has never succeeded in silencing the irrepressible sense of humour of the people bubbling underneath—that De Bono had planned the Abyssinian War in truly Roman terms, and had imagined that he was going to command another Second Punic War, the famous one having lasted, alas, seventeen years! And utterly incapable of command were "General" Teruzzi, "General" Parini, "General" Starace: all men who were—like De Bono—Generals and Marshals of Party creation, without training or military qualification, in the same way as Mussolini, after the Abyssinian campaign, short of depriving the King of the constitutional title of Chief of All Forces, appointed himself First Marshal of the Empire! That the Militia has never been the heroic army it was purported to be

is now conclusively shown by the campaigns in Africa and in Albania.

Besides, the Militia has, for years, been a cause of deep jealousy with the conscripted men of the Army: the enormous pay of the Militiamen, their pampered treatment, their being considered on duty all the year round and therefore drawing their pay, although they were allowed to live at home and attend to their private business. And the privileges attached to the Militiamen! If perchance you happened to have a quarrel with the decorator who had overcharged you for paperhanging your flat, and after a good go at him over the telephone (in true Italian form) you asked him to call for his money if he wanted it, you might see him arriving arrayed in all the panoply of the Militia—jackboots, black tassel and dagger. That was in itself an argument sedative enough for any well-meaning citizen.

THE FAILURE TO PREPARE FOR WAR

The second point is that the three Services have all suffered terribly through the absorption of every control by the Government, and therefore by the Party. The whole business of contracting fell as an automatic privilege to the Party men or officers in favour with the Party. As an instance, there was the

case of General Cavallero, the present Chief of Staff and Commander-in-Charge of the Albanian campaign, who, when Under-Secretary for War, was compelled to leave office owing to a scandal about Army contracts ; and yet, some years afterwards, was made managing director of the Ansaldo Armament Works, solely because he enjoyed the favour of the Party as an early and active member as opposed to Marshal Badoglio, who has never taken up membership of the Fascist Party. The present inadequacy of the Italian preparation, and the surprising lack of fore-thought, are the result of this Party control over the Services, aggravated by the appalling greed and corruption of the men in charge.

The only Service that is likely to be more loyal to the Party is the Air Force, which, of necessity, had been developed under the régime, by the untiring energy and enthusiasm of the late Marshal Balbo—so mysteriously disposed of. But even the Italian airmen must now feel that they have been let down by the inadequacy of their equipment and by the inferiority of their machines in design and in quality. One would say, when looking at the military situation of the régime, that the whole thing points to a falseness in the Fascist doctrine and to deception by the Party machine : for seventeen years Fascism has beaten the big drum like a dud firm that

has nothing to show but the empty dummies in its showcases.

The other factor that one must take into account is the instinctive revulsion of the Italian people to a war on the side of Germany. Now the Germans have occupied Sicily, and it is said that they have taken control of key points and services all over Italy. How long will the Italians suffer in silence the Germans trampling their streets and barking commands? For years we have heard the régime proclaim the miracles of Fascism: the only miracle of Fascism is to have brought the Germans back into Italy!

THE POTENTIAL REVOLT

A word that is often spoken in these days when discussing Italy is the word "revolt." It is, indeed, a word that may soon come to be a reality. On the other hand, I feel that one must say with honest frankness that it may, for a long time, still remain in a potential stage, and to think otherwise may only lead to the disappointment that follows wishful thinking.

It must be admitted that the military events of the last three months have moved at such a pace that it can now be said that Mussolini may soon have to choose between a capitulation to Britain and a capitulation to Hitler.

(if he has not already chosen perforce the second course), and in either case Mussolini will have the Italian people to face. The attack against Greece has proved not only that Fascist Italy was militarily unprepared, but that the Italian Army and the Italian people did not want Mussolini's war. The departure of Marshal Badoglio must be considered a serious moral blow for Mussolini, for in the eyes of the people Badoglio stood as the embodiment of the highest and most disinterested patriotism and the personification of that honest Army spirit which the Marshal himself had expressed when he gave warning that Germany was a dangerous Ally for Italy. The defeats in Africa and in Albania are more than sufficient to make plausible the rumours that the Italian people are accusing the Fascist régime of a complete fiasco. And the Italian people are fully aware that help from the Germans would only accelerate the complete absorption of Italy into the German Protectorate.

We may, therefore, assume that the internal situation in Italy may at any moment release the spark that will ignite the revolt. And certain factors can with a degree of certainty be placed on the positive side: the Royal Family, the Army, and the Church. The Royal Family and the Army must be considered as complementary and on the same

plane, for they can succeed only by moving together. However cautious one may be in contemplating the attitude of the Royal Family, one can say that any courageous move by the old King or by the Crown Prince would find a vast support in the Army, and consequently among the people. And that the Regular Army is averse to the régime is no secret. The officers of the Army have always resented the intrusion of the Militia, and the ranks hate the Militiamen as the man in the street hates a swaggering bully. The Church is opposed to the war and to the alliance of Italy with Nazidom ; and although the Vatican will not intervene openly because the Lateran Treaty prevents the Vatican from interfering in any war in which Italy is a party, the Church has against Mussolini the old and ever-powerful weapon of the persuasion conveyed through the confessional.

On the other hand, let us remember that the Italians are not, by instinct, revolutionary. Far from it. Not even in the Risorgimento period can we detect more than a sporadic, one would even say individual, spirit of revolt against a tyrant ; and the tyrant then—let us bear this very clearly in mind—was a foreign Power. Fascism to-day is a tyranny of Italians against Italians, which is quite different. One can say for a certainty that the Italian people would, as a whole, react

more strongly and with more solidarity against a German oppression than against the Fascist oppression.

One may say that the Fascist oppression is to-day identified with the German oppression, and that Fascism becomes every day more and more the long hand of German oppression. However true this is, it would be difficult to make the Italian people revolt solely on political grounds.

THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH

Another point to be borne in mind is that in Italy people are substantially different from North to South. In Italy, we have no Midlands; and although geographically a portion of Italy is called "Italia Centrale," in all other respects the Italians themselves always speak of North and South, drawing an imaginary line that does not account for a Midland in the English sense. Nor is the line of division so imaginary, for one could even say with a certain degree of exactitude that in the North and in the South one has to deal with different races. The degree of dislike for Fascism is sensibly different in the North and in the South. The degree of reaction upon which one could count would, therefore, be even more markedly different. The sturdy spirit of determination of the

North—both in endurance and in revolt—would be nowhere visible in the South. Furthermore, whilst the people of the North are instinctively independent and capable of complete organisation and of political as well as economic self-sufficiency, the people of the South are, by the tradition of centuries, inclined to accept any form of Government as long as that Government keeps them going. It is not a casual fact that the bulk of the bureaucracy—the countless army of the Civil Service, that Fascism has increased tenfold with the superimposition of the Party machine upon the State machinery—is drawn from the South. For generations the small middle classes of the South have brought up their sons to be nothing else but Civil Servants—passive (and rather lazy) cogs in the huge bureaucratic machinery of the State—and when would the Civil Servants revolt against the régime from which they draw their very life? More: the South supplies the bulk of the Police; the South supplies also the bulk of the Fascist Militia, the terrible octopus with which the régime suffocates the Italian nation. Still more, from the South are drawn the majority of the Provincial Hierarchs, who are sent by the régime throughout the provinces of Italy to rule in the name of the Fascist Party—to be the dead hand of the régime. To these Provincial Hierarchs are

given wide and rather mysterious powers; two of which can be described: one is the power of terrorism, of arbitrary denunciation, the right of life and death—spiritually, and often materially—over the unhappy citizens; the second is the right to plunder. The Party, the régime itself, closes both eyes to the crime of malversation in the public finances. The Provincial Hierarchs are, one and all, famous throughout the history of Fascism for the ease and speed with which they have exercised their rapacity upon the public finances. A typical case is that of a certain Provincial Secretary of Turin, Gazzotti by name, who arrived in Turin down-at-heels, and two years afterwards declared to the Income Tax an estate of twenty-eight million lire; and that was only what the gentleman thought it decent to declare. Among the higher Hierarchies the rapacity grows with power; not one of the big names can bear looking into. Mussolini's family, Ciano's family, Count Volpi, all of them are alike. It is said that Mussolini very cunningly allowed all his henchmen to rob and plunder so as to have them all in his fist: each of them can be destroyed at a stroke if an inquiry is ordered into their private life and finances.

The intrusion of these Southern bosses into the North has been, for years, one cause of

intense discontent among the Northerners of all classes. In June, 1939, a well-known manufacturer of small arms from the North came to London on a visit. He was most emphatic in telling me his own disgust and that of his friends at the Southern bosses sent to every Province of the North by the Fascist Party. "We are heading for war, and the people in the North are discontent with the régime in every way. They send," he said with undisguised contempt, "they send Southerners to rule us in every branch of our life, even as heads of those Federations of Industry, the whole aim of which seems to be to suffocate any individual initiative. Do they consider that we men of the North are incapable of looking after ourselves? They should remember that if the North is to-day what it is, it is we who have made it, with our work and intelligence, for each and all of our great industries of the North have grown up from family concerns." And this is true in every sense. The great family industries of the North are still to-day great family concerns—Fiat's, the famous car and 'plane factories; Pirelli's, the largest tyre and cable manufacturers; Marelli's, the only magneto manufacturers; Crespi's, the largest cotton and textile industries—great family concerns of which not only the children of the founders are proud, but the whole of the North; and

these great concerns, which the régime has endeavoured to bring under State and Party control, are still in the hands of men who at the bottom of their hearts are not and will never be true Fascists in a Southern sense.

Yet the distribution of the Provincial Secretaries from the South all over Italy has been one of the attempts of the Party to "*meridionalizzare*"—Southernise—the whole of Italy; to submit the whole country to an intensive policy of Southern maladministration; or, rather, to submit it to the administration of men who—for improper reasons—are more loyal to the régime than the upright Northerners would ever be. The man responsible for this was Starace, who held Italy in his sway for nearly eight years, behaving like a foppish and greedy ass, the biggest of all Fascist Rasses, as the Italians call them. And his attempt to Southernise the whole of Italy spread even into journalism. The London correspondent of the *Corriere della Sera*, of Milan, was one of Starace's protégés from his own town, and he was such an extremist that on the day when Dr. Roesel, the Gestapo agent camouflaged as a newspaper man, was expelled from this country (May, 1939), he organised in Roesel's honour a farewell luncheon of the Italian journalists; and at the Embassy we were told that it was advisable to attend it!

The recent "sacking" of fourteen Provincial Secretaries and Party Inspectors—announced on January 9th—shows that the régime is in urgent need of even more ruthless men to bring the people round to the idea of a much closer military "collaboration" with Germany. That the people are growing restive is indicated by the purge itself and by the increased attention given to the home front; in the same way that the rapid deterioration in the economic situation is admitted in the creation of Signor Tassinari as Food Dictator and Signor Renato Ricci as Industrial Dictator, with powers to disgorge hidden raw materials from "unessential" industries, which means a further turn of the screw on the much-tried Northern industrialists. Incidentally, the appointment of Signor Ricci to be Industrial Dictator sounds rather incongruous, as until very recent years Renato Ricci had confined his activities to the juvenile organisations; and it may be an indication that Mussolini is getting short of "reliable" experts.

THE JEWS

Strong allies of a revolt against Fascism can be counted in the Jews. The passing of the Racial Laws against the Jews were very unpopular. There had never been a

Jewish problem in Italy, where the Jewish population amounted to a little over forty thousand. Mussolini himself had always disclaimed any anti-Jewish bias in the Fascist policy. The author remembers well an audience with Mussolini in 1935, shortly before the beginning of the Abyssinian dispute. Mussolini—with that fascinating way he used to display with newspaper men and writers—had touched upon a long range of subjects, and had eventually mentioned the topic of Sir Oswald Mosley and his British Fascists. I was asked for my candid opinion, and had expressed the view that Mosley—apart from being of no use to Italy, at which Mussolini exclaimed, “I fully agree with you”—had no chance of success in Britain because of his anti-Jewish attitude. At this, Mussolini had said: “Perfectly so, and we in Italy fortunately have no Jewish problem at all, and do not see the risk of such a problem ever arising.”

When the time of the anti-Jewish campaign came, it is said that the Jews were paying the penalty for the anti-Fascist attitude taken in England and France at the time of the Abyssinian War; it was also said that their financial dealings in Black-Bourse had severely affected the pegged Italian currency,¹ and

¹ One could make many interesting disclosures about Black-Bourse dealings by Italian officials in London during 1938, notwithstanding the risk of the severe penalties for such dealings.

that the large number of Jews who had entered Italy after the *Anschluss* of Austria with Germany, had inaugurated the system of chain shops which was proving fatal to the small retail trade of Italy. But the campaign proved very unpopular among the Italian people; and it was openly said that if the régime wanted to punish *some* Jews, it could be done without having recourse to methods which were repulsive to the mind and soul of the very liberal Italian people. Everybody whispered that Mussolini had consented to the Jewish campaign only under strong pressure from Germany. It was an open fact that when Hitler had paid his visit to Rome in 1938 a large number of Jews had been taken "into protective custody" by the police at the request of the German Gestapo. It was also openly said that during the sitting of the Fascist Grand Council for the approval of the Racial Campaign, there had been terrific fighting between members as to the colossal mistake of enforcing the Racial Laws. It was said that Marshal Balbo had cried out that the Racial Laws would undermine all his colonial policy in Libya. The Farinacci-Starace gang, in the pay of Germany, had prevailed, and obviously Mussolini's casting vote had been on their side.

The fact is that, notwithstanding the Racial Laws, the attitude of the Italian people

towards the Jews has never changed. The persecutions have, if anything, had the effect of making the intercourse more friendly and sympathetic. Moreover, the régime has never dared to enforce in Italy those savage rules of proscription which have made the life of Jews in Germany so terrible. And when in May, 1940, I was in Rome, I lunched and dined in public places with Jewish friends without the slightest embarrassment.

THE EMIGRÉS

Another important element is represented by the political emigrés. One should, however, exercise a degree of caution in valuing the effectiveness of the *fuorusciti*. Away from their country for ten or fifteen years, they have lost touch with the realities in Italy, and their names have ceased to convey anything to the Italian people. The emigrés will certainly exert an influence ; but it would be unwise to suppose that they can be the determining factor in a revolt against Fascism. This one thing we must visualize quite clearly, and it is that only from inside can Fascism be thrown out—not from outside. Nor would it be wise to think that from the emigrés will emerge the new rulers of a free Italy. The present War for Freedom must have two aims : to assure food and work for all, and

to create a basis upon which the people of each country will be able to rebuild their free governments. It will, therefore, be for the Italian people in Italy to elect the men who will govern their country : and although the Italian people would welcome back the emigrés with a generous heart, no one outside Italy should claim a preternatural right to be the successor of Mussolini.

The unhappy position is that to-day in Italy there is no one who could be looked upon as the Leader of to-morrow. That is the penalty of a Dictatorship ; the men produced by Fascism can visualise a government only in terms of tyranny, and each of them thinks of himself as a future Dictator. Italy would have, fatally, to go through a Government of transition, perhaps a military dictatorship of the Regular Army, with or without the Crown at the back, until from the conscience of the people would emerge the new form of democratic government best suited to the New Free Europe.

CONCLUSION

IT may be rash to say that an underground organisation exists in Italy. All one can say is that an enormous majority of the Italian people are potentially ready to become members of a brotherhood of dissatisfied men. This can be taken as axiomatic. If Mussolini wanted to put in prison all those who are against the war, he would have to arrest ninety-five per cent. of the Italian people.

These potential elements can, and should, be treated as the soil of the Good Earth, which is going to yield fruit and harvest only if we till it and sow it with love and with faith. The tilling must come foremost.

But then, we must sow the good seed of Hope—and the hope must be in the New Free Europe of to-morrow. The enslaved peoples of Europe are the potential Allies of Britain in the War for Freedom. But Freedom will not be a reality unless it is restored in a New Europe. But what sort of Europe? This is not the place to attempt, even superficially, to solve such a vast and complex problem.

It may be said, however, that no European nation can be safe for ever without the co-operation of all the other nations of Europe. It is a dogma that derives from the peculiar distribution of wealth and natural resources in Europe. No European nation can be an independent unit: it can only exist in a chain of "interdependent" units. It may sound Utopian to mention the Federation of the United States of Europe; but only something on that line could make Europe "safe for Democracy" and prevent the repetition of wars every twenty years.

It is vital that the statesmen of Britain should no longer delay putting forward the message upon which hangs the co-operation of all the peoples at present subjugated in Europe. And it must be made clear that the British victory will bring real freedom to those unhappy peoples, and, what is more important still, that it will produce the political structure upon which to make such freedom durable. This applies, one may say, to all the peoples of Europe, and I emphatically say, to the people of Italy. The masses in Italy are not politically minded in the Fascist sense. For in Italy, more than in other European countries, the masses are a conglomeration of individuals in which only the individual force prevails; Fascism has not succeeded in

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cementing the conglomeration, and the individual Italian to-day wants peace—and wants to live his own life. In this sense, the Italian citizen is the potential embodiment of a universal citizenship. — —

